San Jose State University
SJSU ScholarWorks

Master's Theses | Master's Theses and Graduate Research

1999

# Critical hermeneutics and teacher discourse

Catherine R. Thornton
*San Jose State University*

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses

Recommended Citation
Thornton, Catherine R., "Critical hermeneutics and teacher discourse" (1999). *Master's Theses*. 1850.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.5er4-gwrc
https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses/1850

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses and Graduate Research at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@sjsu.edu.

# INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

**The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.** Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

**UMI**

A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

# CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS AND TEACHER DISCOURSE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Division of Teacher Education

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts

by

Catherine R. Thornton

May 1999

UMI Number: 1394562

UMI Microform 1394562
Copyright 1999, by UMI Company. All rights reserved.

This microform edition is protected against unauthorized
copying under Title 17, United States Code.

UMI
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

© 1999

Catherine R. Thornton

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

APPROVED FOR THE DIVISION OF TEACHER EDUCATION

Dr. Victoria Harper

Dr. Carolyn Nelson

Dr. Kristeen Pemberton

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

William Fisher

ABSTRACT

CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS AND TEACHER CHANGE

By Catherine R. Thornton

This thesis addresses the role a community of conversation plays in supporting the successful implementation of new programs into school classroom settings. It examines the effect of critical conversation in assisting individual teachers to make more appropriate curriculum/pedagogical choices in the classroom.

Formal and informal interviews were done at the school site of a multi-ethnic elementary school located in the Silicon Valley. Five first grade teachers were involved as participants in the interview process. I was one of the participants.

This research examines teachers' discourse as five first grade teachers look at their own practice while embarking on the implementation of a new reading program, REACH. The central focus of the research is on "a community of learners-in-conversation."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my principal for her support during the research process. Not only did she allow time for me to interview the teachers involved, she encouraged the process and believed in the value of the research. This research would not have taken place without willing participants. I wish to thank my first grade colleagues for being so willing to give of their time to take an active part in the research process. They were a great team to work with and I am blessed to be in the hermeneutical circle with them as we all learn.

I cannot overlook the encouragement of my family in this process. They were supportive in the midst of my busy schedule. Scott was a supportive husband and believed in me when I was ready to give up. Jacquie and Janine went the extra mile helping with their baby brother and household chores while I attended classes, wrote and edited. Finally, Tyler brought the joy and energy of a young boy to my life.

A special thanks to Dr. Victoria Harper for all of her guidance, patience and help throughout the writing process. I am grateful for the time she spent reading and re-reading my drafts. Thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# CHAPTER ONE:

# DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

## A Personal Reflection

Some of my first memories of play were as a young child playing school. My older siblings would go off to the small country school; I was so envious. I wanted to go to school too. I would play school with my grandmother or by myself. Somehow, in those early years of "play," I learned to read. I loved to read. Although I assume I learned to read with a strong basis in phonics, I don't remember much about my reading instruction in school. I do remember being encouraged to read and write.

I loved going to the school library. I cannot remember the librarian's name, but I can still see her standing at the entrance to the library as our class entered for our weekly visit. "Cathy," she would say, "I have a book I think you will enjoy." I eagerly accepted the book. Soon I would enter into the pages of the book, replacing the main character with my own image. Books came alive. Reading took me places, gave me adventures, enlarged my world.

As I grew, went to school, married, and had children, I somehow replaced the longing for books with other seemingly more pressing needs. However, when my first daughter, Jacquie, was born, I wanted her to be immersed in print from the moment she came into the world. I read to her daily. One of her first words was "Ruth," a character from the Bible storybook her dad read to her each morning.

Jacquie was a bright child and entered school with a love for books and early prereading skills. How disheartened she was when some of her friends were pulled out of kindergarten to go to a special reading group because they could "read" in kindergarten. In first grade, she felt this same sense of failure as these same girls were placed in a reading level above her. In second grade, however, she finally "made it" and was placed in the high reading level. From that time on, reading and spelling seemed easy for Jacquie. She read often, rarely needed to study for spelling tests, and writing seemed to flow for her.

My second daughter, Janine, had more difficulty developing reading skills. In kindergarten she was given phonetic instruction on letters and sounds. Although she was much more energetic than Jacquie, a good book and mom or dad's lap held her interest for an extended length of time. She too loved reading, but was not yet ready to "read" the printed word for herself.

At this time, the local college promoted the idea that children would read when they were "ready." Janine's first grade teacher had just graduated from this college and incorporated this philosophy into her teaching. She told me, "When she is ready, she will read. Do not force her. There is no need to teach her formally. Phonics is not necessary. She will pick up reading by reading." Many new teachers, given "quick" and limited training in the process, abandoned skill or phonetic instruction completely for what they called a "whole language approach." They believed that merely keeping the printed word in front of the child would result in their learning to read "when they were ready."

When Janine entered second grade, I was becoming concerned; she was frustrated. She wanted to learn how to read in school, not during her precious play time at home. That year I volunteered to help in the classroom. My task was to take ten children who were below grade level in reading to another room, give them a second grade reader, and have them follow along as I read. The local school district board mandated that every second grader be in the district-adopted second grade reader. Consequently, these children were going to look at a second grade reader even if fifty percent of them were unable to read it. I was told that I needed to read to them because they could not read these print-filled pages. At each reading session, it was clear that their little bodies would become "antsy." They looked at everything in the room except the pictureless pages filled with symbols they recognized only as letters. Those who did follow along were only following word segmentation. During the first parent teacher conference, I was bold enough to question this practice with the teacher. The teacher told me that fifty percent of the second graders in the local school tested at a kindergarten level in reading. The school administration was confident, however, that they would "bloom when they were ready." No one seemed concerned.

My worry was not so much focused on where the children were in their reading level, but rather what could their progress have been with a different approach? Were other children feeling as discouraged as Janine by such a system? Understanding my concern, Janine's teacher agreed to send her to the remedial reading teacher. Within a small group of five children, she received phonemic training and reading instruction at her reading

level. Within weeks, she was becoming a reader. The teacher thought the timing must have been perfect; Janine must have become ready to "bloom." She quickly advanced from the bottom of her class to the upper middle level.

These experiences, unfolding in my own historical narrative and with my own children's school experiences, have made me much more self-conscious of my own teaching practices. As a teacher, I have observed a new method of reading, writing, or math taught nearly every year. Enthusiasts often discard all former practices in order to fully embrace the new; others refuse to consider anything new. On what basis should teachers embrace or reject new practices? Can teachers afford to jump into new practices without examining them along with current practices to determine what might be most effective in their classroom? Should any classroom teacher embrace one single approach when children learn in such different ways? What might enable teachers to make wise choices when new programs and practices are thrust upon them?

## First Year as a Teacher

Being in the classroom as a teacher, a substitute (both long and short term), and as a parent, provoked me to think about what might be the "ideal teaching situation." The "ideal" situation for me, I surmised, had to involve a "team support system." According to Garcia (1994), collaboration and conversation help teachers to develop new skills and understanding.

The responsibilities I have had as a minister's wife helped me realize that I could be more successful if I worked closely with other people, dialoguing, bouncing around ideas,

talking about successes and failures, and planning for the future. Pouring over my teaching evaluations from past teaching experiences, I realized that part of the evaluation process mandated regular grade level meetings. My successes, therefore, had been realized in collaboration and conversation with others.

The realization that I work best with a strong support system was pivotal in bringing me to apply for a job I might not have considered before. After returning home from vacation in August 1996, I read that California had offered compensation to districts that would implement class size reduction (20:1) in the primary grades beginning that very school year. This legislation sent school districts scrambling to find teachers. At first, I dismissed the idea of applying for one of these newly created positions. I was too busy to go back to work full time at this point in my life; I was working on my master's degree, had two teenage daughters, a ten-month-old son, and a husband who was a pastor.

As the school year approached, however, a first grade teacher was still needed at the school where I had filled a number of long term positions over the last few years. The principal, anxious to find a credentialed teacher, asked me to consider at least starting the year as a substitute for the first grade until someone could be hired. First grade! My experience was in upper elementary school. Although, as a substitute teacher, I had been able to follow other primary teachers' plans successfully, I worried that it would be different from being responsible for a first grade class myself. Did I know how to teach reading at the beginning level?

After much discussion around the dinner table, my family convinced me that they would support me if I applied for the full-time first grade position. Teaching reading was still a roadblock. I had studied four main approaches to teaching reading as part of my professional education and knew that some favored phonics, while others the basal, literature, or the language experience/writing approach. I had seen each of these approaches come "in" and "out" of favor with educators.

I expressed my interest to the principal, and told her that if she were at all considering me for the position, I would need to attend the REACH training with the rest of the staff before the year began. REACH is an acronym for R-Role of the School Community; E-Effective Core Literacy Program; A- Appropriate Safety Net Strategies; C- Continuing Professional Development; and H- Home/School Partnerships. The program had been discussed in a staff meeting I had attended the previous year. It incorporated literacy techniques used in the past with an emphasis on contextual learning. I had been intrigued by this "new," "old" approach to literacy development for children. I was invited to the training and hired for the first grade position. Although the question of how to best teach reading and writing is a debated issue, the REACH training offered what they called a "balanced approach" that seemed to make sense. This approach is based on grounded knowing rather than isolated, fragmented learning. Oliver (1990) describes grounded knowing as feeling "the many aspects of an occasion as they (teachers and students) move into the unity of an event" (65). The REACH program presents the many aspects of reading and writing in what the program authors call, a "meaningful

way," where children participate in a morning message, shared readings and writings, story rewrites, an author's chair, spelling, graphic organizers, comprehension strategies and personal journal entries. Attending the REACH training gave me some of the tools I would need to begin the year. I also needed added support from my colleagues. I was not alone in my need for support. I approached the other first grade teachers suggesting that I would like to meet on a regular basis to discuss teaching practices, particularly reading. They willingly accepted the idea. Agreeing to enter into a critical action research project, we wanted to study how our teaching was enabling our students to further their own education, to become life-long learners, and to see education as something created, not produced. Through our agreement, we established a support system for meaningful action research to take place.

> Unlike 'traditional' educational research, critical action research is interwoven with change and takes place in direct cooperation with the educational practice the research seeks to serve' (Brock-Utne, in Rogers, Noblit, and Ferrell 1990, 151).

Through examining the reading/literacy processes taking place in our first grade classrooms, we hoped to experience change, not only in our students ability to read and write, but in ourselves as teachers and researchers.

## Looking Into Our Own Practice

As participants, we believed that to simply take the various theories of teaching literacy, incorporate them into practice, and discuss their "outcomes" would limit our ability to use them effectively by inhibiting our judgment as to when these practices should and should not be used. It was important that each of us be willing to critically

examine our practice in light of our own taken-for-granted beliefs. Communicative competence begins with the openness to recognize or search for these taken-for-granted beliefs in teaching (Bowers 1987).

Two weeks after school started in the fall of 1996, our grade level team held its first meeting to discuss how to begin implementation of the REACH program in each of our classrooms. We wanted our stories to be more than sharing; we hoped they would lead to new stories, ones from which we could all learn.

Research has typically been done outside of the classroom by someone other than the teacher. Shor (1992) speaks of this as the "elsewhereness" of research done in the past. Seeing the need for research to take place within classrooms, Shor claims that, "To study something in-depth is to do research. In this sense, research implies detailed investigation, and extensive exploration of subject matter, thought and language (169)."

By learning about our own teaching, we hoped to transform our daily experiences into something profound . . . as a window . . . and be able to see the beliefs, behaviors, and insights of our own first grade team. Through these insights, we hoped to become more aware of our teaching practices and their influence on our students' reading. As effective teachers, we wanted to better understand our students' learning processes, to discover what was and was not really being learned (Shor 1992). We realized that this was a process that would require conversation, observation, and reflection time.

## Research Questions

As teachers are constantly presented new educational theories and ways of teaching, this study was intended to help the first grade teachers at a suburbia elementary school, located in the Silicon Valley, take a critical look into the teaching of literacy in their first grade classes. As we met throughout the school year to discuss successes, failures, fears, and anticipations, I particularly wanted to consider:

1. What role does a community of conversation support play in the successful implementation of new programs into the school classroom setting?

2. How does critical conversation affect individual teacher's ability to make more appropriate curriculum/pedagogical choices in the classroom?

With these questions in mind, the 1996-1997 school year began. The first grade teachers entered into a critical conversation that would last throughout the school year.

# CHAPTER TWO

# LITERATURE: KNOWLEDGE, CRITICAL DIALOGUE AND READING

## What Constitutes Knowledge?

> *"Through the process of communication, social reality is being continuously renewed in the consciousness of new members, while at the same time undergoing a process of gradual revision as each participant negotiates minor changes (and occasionally major ones) that reflect differences in perspective and existential stance" (Bowers 1987, 35)*

Schools typically have been a social structure responsible for passing on "knowledge" to the young. To define just what knowledge is vital for schools to teach, books have been written, committees formed, task forces activated and millions of dollars spent. Yet, we still see new books, new committees, new task forces, and more money being spent every year to decide what is important for teachers to be teaching in the classroom.

Regardless of the diligent work of scholars and political agents, schools have not been able to meet the needs of our varied population. The belief that this information is useful to all students fails to take into account gender, ethnicity, class, or age differences. It also represents the interests of those scholars, and others, who pass on this form of knowledge. In recent years, educational scholars have acknowledged a new awareness

that knowledge is neither neutral nor objective, "but is presented instead from particular perspectives and represents certain interests" (Drake and Ryan 1994, 48).

What, then, constitutes knowledge? Kincheloe (1991) believes that a critical constructivist assumes that there is no knowledge without a knower and that knowledge and the knower are ever changing. As Kincheloe states, "The knower and the known are Siamese twins connected at the point of perception" (27). Knowledge here is believed to be the prerequisite for social action, where social action continually transforms, thereby constantly ever changing knowledge.

Here, I will adopt a feminist notion in defining knowledge. Feminist scholars take into consideration the existence of silences and absences when looking at knowledge, as opposed to looking only at what is considered certain and scientific. This perspective is in deep contrast to Cartesian science, which views knowledge as detached, hard, rational, and certain. Taking the feminist notion is a move away from separating thought and feeling from knowledge.

Different epistemologies promote different forms of knowledge therefore, there is not a consistent view of evaluating the various forms of knowledge. Knowledge is dependent on its context and interest. Habermas (1971), in discussing knowledge and its relationship to cognitive interests, concludes that knowledge cannot be separated from human interests. He maintains there are three forms of knowledge that humans use to address problems. These three forms are the technical interest, practical interests, and emancipatory interests in human social life. The technical interest is based on utilitarian

knowledge, that is, knowledge that can be put into categories and be reproduced. It is an empirical-analytic knowledge that is used to predict and control patterns of events. The practical interest is based on the need for communication and understanding and allows for the communication needed to pass on traditions and preserve actions that result from commonality. Finally, the emancipatory interest connects the act of knowing with the appropriation of knowledge and subsequent action. This allows the individual to become aware of the connection between knowledge and interest (Kincheloe 1991). As individuals see beyond the printed text, they can begin to see the human author's biases, interests, and agenda in writing the text. The text is no longer neutral stating only the facts. Now the "facts" are understood to be from an individual point of view.

The ancient Greeks organized knowledge into three classifications: theoretical knowledge (*episteme*), moral knowledge (*phronesis*), and technical knowledge (*techne*). Moral and technical knowledge can be found in Habermas' model. Gadamer clarifies the distinction between the two stating,

> Perhaps the most important difference is that *phronesis* (moral knowledge) involves a self-knowledge that is not required in technical know-how . . . technical knowledge is knowledge about means and in a sense is itself a means, . . . technical knowledge requires cleverness in application, moral knowledge requires understanding (in Gallagher 1992, 153).

If all understanding requires interpretation, then it is *phronesis* that is being employed. Because interpretation is necessary, the interpreter cannot be separated from the interpretation. Knowledge that is a part of the interpreter consequently cannot be objectified.

Freire (1970) proposes that the idea of moral knowledge is found in problem posing where a critical teacher asks thought provoking questions that encourages students to ask their own questions. This process begins when a problem is presented for inquiry which is related to a key aspect of the student's experience. Problem-posing promotes a search for knowledge instead of a banking or transfer view of knowledge. It is a mutual search. In contrast to the transfer of knowledge, problem posing offers information and subject matter as "historical products to be questioned rather than as universal wisdom to be accepted" (Shor 1992, 32). Knowledge, thus, is viewed as an unfinished product.

This approach does not discount formal learning, but incorporates it within a context. Shor (1992), clarifies this stating:

> Formal bodies of knowledge, standard usage, and the teacher's academic background all belong in critical classrooms. As long as existing knowledge is not presented as facts and doctrines to be absorbed without question, as long as existing bodies of knowledge are critiqued and balanced from a multicultural perspective, and as long as the students' own themes and idioms are valued along with standard usage, existing canons are part of critical education (35).

Teachers and students need to recognize that knowledge is a social construction that is a part of themselves, not something externally done to them.

## Critical Hermeneutic Theory and Teaching

Living in the "Silicon Valley" heightens our awareness that change is inevitable. Computers are outdated before they come out of the box, E-mail has connected individuals, corporations, and the world. Information is truly just a fingertip away with the use of the World Wide Web. Technology is only one example of the constant change our society faces. Information printed in encyclopedias has changed before the volumes

are bound. An approach to education based on critical hermeneutic theory recognizes the changing nature of reality. With this recognition comes the understanding that information is changing continually, and what "stable" information we have is contingent and biased.

Hermeneutics, according to Gadamer, allows us,

> To let that what is alienated by the character of the written word or by the character of being distantiated by cultural or historical distances speak again: to let what seems to be far and alienated speak again (in Gallagher 1992, 4)

To allow for this reinterpretation, individuals must engage in continual dialogue where views, ideas, and actions are constantly being discussed rather than merely focusing on procedures. Dialogue cannot be accomplished through a one-way transmission of knowledge model exemplified in traditional schools. Dialogic pedagogy involves conversation and time for reflection. Gallagher (1992) states that,

> Those who take the critical approach to education will insist upon the power of reflection to break up structures of power and authority in educational processes and institutions (19).

Rather than seeing students as puppets to be manipulated, teachers must view them as active agents with the potential to set and achieve their own goals. In this process, teachers, students, and parents all participate. Allowing students and parents a voice is a concept that has been ignored as "experts" believe they know better than the teacher, parent, and, of course, the students.

Critical reflection can help break up the structures and powers within individuals that hold them captive to "old" ways. Individuals do not come as blank slates. Instead, with

them each brings their own phenomenological world of ideas, situations, and the heritage that has helped shape the self. Background knowledge includes both personal and educational experiences. Learning occurs in situations where there is an interchange of ideas, words, thoughts, or gestures among two or more people. This may involve the student and the teacher or the student and others (Gallagher 1992).

For example, whenever the teacher "teaches," there must be an understanding that it is the student who is interpreting the pedagogical presentation. Bowers proposes that three principles are necessary for consideration by critical action researchers when they are teaching any lesson. First, the teacher needs to link the phenomenological world of the children with the curriculum in the learning process. Where are the children coming from? What are they bringing into the lesson? How will they view and interpret what is being expressed? Second, the curriculum needs to be deobjectified. Children need to know that the knowledge being presented to them has been handed down by human beings and is not concrete fact or absolute, as some believe. Third, the students need to be given a cross-cultural perspective (Bowers 1987). A child living in an apartment with several other families may view a "home" in a different manner than the teacher who lives in a four bedroom suburban home within a traditional nuclear family. When reading a story about a "home," the teacher must realize that the student's interpretation of the word "home" may be vastly different than their own. The concept of a suburban home, presented in a book being read to the children, can only be understood by the children as they first see "home" in light of what their "home" is like, the unfamiliar will be seen in

light of the familiar. The interchange that takes place then becomes not only an interchange of information, but also that of interpretations (Gallagher 1992). At times the leap from what is presented to what is interpreted is too great and discounts the student from classroom learning.

Material presented in the classroom must be evaluated. This may be a formal or an informal evaluation. Adjustments to the lesson are made as the teacher interprets not merely the subject matter, but the student's comprehension and progress. This process makes the educational experience a hermeneutical experience, an experience in which there is constant reinterpretation and reflection. Gallagher (1992) believes "learning is a universal feature of all human activity" and always involves interpretation (40).

Teachers cannot simply be spectators in the student's education. Critical teachers are not only concerned with the present lives of the children, but also their future. Teachers are active participants in their learning and development. Gallagher (1992), quoting Dewey, states, "We do not anticipate results as mere intellectual onlookers, but as persons concerned in the outcome, we are partakers in the process which produces the result (44)."

Interpretation is the laying out of meaning (Gallagher 1992). No matter what is being learned, it is learned with a preconceived idea of what it is already about. A kindergarten child may not have factual knowledge about dinosaurs, yet may come into the conversation on dinosaurs with knowledge that "Barney" is a dinosaur on television. As the teacher speaks about dinosaurs, the child may be thinking of "Barney." By the

time the cognitive apprehension arrives on the scene, the scene has already been laid out and structured by unconscious interests. Interpretation, Heidegger (in Gallagher 1992) claims, "has already decided for a definite way of conceiving it" (44).

## Socialization through Language

Language is important in the classroom as it plays a vital role in transmitting conceptual maps that enable students to participate in a shared social world. It is the language environment that establishes boundaries and provides linguistic foundations that make thought and communication possible (Bowers 1987). This is not only true for the classroom, but the home, workplace, and in society. It is language that gives each of us the conceptual map to name "what is." One has only to look at an emotional infant trying to communicate their wishes to realize that the absence of language can be most frustrating. On the other hand, a look at a teenager wanting to use the family car finds the teenager realizing just how powerful the "proper" language can be. It is important to acknowledge, however, that it is not only the spoken word that holds power, but the implied unspoken as well.

## Audible Silences

The absence of language or dialogue or "audible silences" also exhibits power over its audience. The concept of audible silences refers to,

> . . . areas of human experience about which there is a collective silence in the larger society due either to a lack of communicative competence in focusing and articulating the issues or to the fear that often arises when it is no longer possible to escape existential choices forced on us by critical awareness (Bowers 1987, 63).

The dominant belief system often found in curriculum, for example, typifies "technology" as a wellspring of knowledge, and "progress" as the way to better our future. Drawbacks of technology or progress, however, are "silenced." Another example might be that of cultural injustice silenced in an effort to promote the idea of America as a land of freedom, equality and justice.

Schools have attempted to help break some of these silences with regards to sex education, sexism, racism, and career choice, to name a few. Information being presented in schools however still communicates many audible silences. Are teachers willing to expose the audible silences found in children's books, curriculum, testing, the workplace, and society? Are teachers willing to examine and confront their own audible silences? For this to happen, teachers must first be aware that audible silences exist. Only then will they be able to begin to recognize the audible silences in their own lives. Only with this recognition will the possibilities for just change come about.

Every human activity involves interpretation and brings with it the practical interest of the interpreter. Interpretation cannot be entirely objective in that it involves human activity that is not entirely within our control. Teachers play an important part in the language moves that take place in the classroom. The language a teacher uses can extend or limit the student's ability to think of things in many ways. Students assume that the language used by the teacher is the natural way to see and think about the world (Bowers 1987). Without a critical perspective in the classroom, where both the teacher and students are viewed as learners, students will become "clones" of the teacher's

knowledge. Only when both parties are involved in the critical process can the classroom become an empowering, positive, "playful" place.

**Interpretation and Tradition: The Role of Play**

A critical classroom is filled with "play." Many would agree with this as a description of pre-school, but would question "play" when referring to elementary, junior high, high school, or college. According to Gallagher (1992), "play" can be seen as the act of one losing oneself in a back and forth process. The function of play is to make manifest the absolute freedom which is the very being of the person (Sartre 1956, 581).

In the "play" of learning, there is not a predictable final goal, but, instead, a constant renewing that goes beyond original intention. At a point in the interchange of text, the reader is lost and the content takes over. In the "play" of reading comes transcendence where the reader (or player) looses themself in the text. Blackie (1968) claims, "children begin to discover the possibilities and limitations of their own powers," going beyond themselves and venturing into the unknown (40). This process is essential to all educational experience. The possibilities of transcendence created in play have their greatest appeal, not in the play itself, but in the transformation that takes place as a result of the play, where one finds himself again in a transformed manner with an openness for new experiences (Gallagher 1992).

Vygotsky (1978) also placed a great deal of stress on play, noting that play is rule governed. In order for play to be enjoyable, there must be rules or boundaries that are

agreed upon by the players. He states,

> Play, like school, should create a Zone of Proximal Development. Through it the child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself (102).

Learning might be viewed as play, because in play the self is in a constant state of reconstruction where a constant transcendence and appropriation takes place through the possibilities created in the educational experience. As Gallagher (1992) claims,

> In play we are constantly learning about ourselves in light of our experiences. If play is the dialectical interchange of transcendence and appropriation, then not only is play one kind of educational experience but it might make sense to say that all educational experience involves play in this fundamental sense (53).

Kincheloe (1991) identifies "play as an essential part of meaningful work." The principles of work variety, workmate cooperation, individual contribution to social welfare and play are viewed as virtues that must be incorporated into work. These contribute to what Kincheloe calls "good work." Good work is necessary if the schools are to become democratic places of learning where the abilities and interests of the individual are considered. This involves self-direction and teachers viewing their job as a place of learning where all are encouraged to contribute to knowledge creation and where teachers are involved in the role of research.

The concept of good work is in sharp contrast with the modernist view of work. "Bad work," according to Kincleloe (1991), is evident when everyone is out for himself, nature is viewed as an enemy to be controlled, science is viewed as facts to be provided, efficiency is the driving force, success is viewed as short-term, and human happiness is dependent on the acquisition of better consumer items. Bad work, Kincheloe believes,

has produced shoddy products, apathy, hostility, alcohol and drug abuse, nihilism, reliance on experts, and depression (1991).

To resist the practice of "bad work," teachers must insist on having genuine input and control, rather than allowing control over their work to come from those who have little contact with the students. In order for this to happen, teachers must view themselves as capable of doing research, examining their own teaching, and questioning their school's practices and social vision.

It is the very processes involved in "play" which makes "good work" possible. What happens in play needs to be promoted in the classroom and workplace, rather than "traditional" objective/goal/ cartesian-oriented experiences that lead to "bad work."

## The Hermeneutical Circle

Play involves the same structure as interpretation. This shared structure has been described by Gadamer as a "hermeneutical circle," (in Gallagher 1992) where the whole can only be understood through the meaning of the parts and the parts can only be understood through the meaning of the whole. The hermeneutical circle is used to describe a process of coming to new and ethical understandings. The circle involves moving from a current understanding (the "is") to appropriation, re-appropriation, and transcendence. Although we have sought to give names and order to the processes involved in transcendence, it is important to recognize that this order may be shifted at times. The beginning stage can be thought of as "what is," or the unexamined present. In appropriation, traditions and cultural history are realized. One can then start to make

their own what once belonged to someone else. New possibilities of new understandings are available. At this point, one may enter reappropriation. Here, the lenses are focused, beliefs are re-aligned, and transformation may take place where new understandings are realized, creating the potential for a state of transcendence. In transcendence, one is able to move beyond their current narrow horizons toward an indefinite interchange that simultaneously presents both challenge and risk. Familiar ground is risked "in order to allow unfamiliar to find its place" (Gallagher 1992, 139). Although often referred to as a circle, a spiral presents a better metaphor. A circle implies closure while the spiral represents the ongoing process involved in transformation where questioning is ongoing.

Schliemacher (1977) states,

> When we consider the task of interpretation with this principle in mind, we have to say that our increasing understanding of each instance and of each section (of text), an understanding, which we achieve by starting at the beginning and moving forward slowly is always provisional. It becomes more complete as we are able to see each larger section as a coherent unity.

He goes on to state,

> But as soon as we turn to a new part we encounter new uncertainties and begin again, as it were, in the dim morning light. It is like starting all over, except that as we push ahead the new material illumines everything we have already treated, until suddenly at the end every part is clear and the whole work is visible in sharp and definite contours (96).

The more movement in the circle, the larger it grows. Husserl (1973) uses hermeneutical theory to explain that individuals are not presented as blank slates; they know more about an experience than they are aware. They may discover this through conversation. He

believes understanding always involves a change where something is understood in a different way. This need not be a superior way. For Gadamer,

> Human understanding involves a constant temporal process of revision; it is always finite, temporal, circular, and incomplete interpretation because of the existential temporal structure of human existence (in Gallagher 1992, 62).

Frank Smith (1975) calls the schema "cognitive structure," concluding that,

> . . . the only effective and meaningful way in which anyone can learn is by attempting to relate new experiences to what he knows (or believes) already. In other words, comprehension and learning are inseparable (1).

There is a constant reviewing in the hermeneutic process, where a hermeneutical circle is formed and a more complete understanding reached. If the structure or revising collapses, however, learning is shut down. This results in one falling into a state of what Gallagher (1992) calls "dogmatic slumber" (74). He explains that,

> Learning requires (a) a dialogue or circulating relationship between an individual learner's fore-structure and the subject matter; and (b) a dialogue between the teacher's understanding and the pedagogical presentation. These two kinds of dialogue or interchanges are not unrelated; as parts, they enter into a third dialectical interchange which constitutes the whole of the classroom situation-- the give and take of discussion, the interchange of interpretations between teacher and student (74).

This constant exchange of understandings and questioning is what keeps the hermeneutical circle or spiral dynamic. It is through questioning that undetermined possibilities are made available. It is the question that opens up new possibilities for meaning.

## The Role of Dialogue

A critical hermeneutical approach involves dialogue. It is through dialogue that it is possible for teachers to become theorists, articulating their intentions, testing their

assumptions, and finding connections within their practice. Teachers can be transformed, as a network is formed, and resources shared (Shor 1992). Through daily reflection, formal or informal, the cultural maps directing children's learning are placed under constant revision and, perhaps, scrutiny. It is through this constant revision that educational needs are met and growth made. Critical hermeneutical teacher research and conversations can play a vital and enhancing role in directing curriculum creation.

Additional support for critical hermeneutical teacher research is found in the work of Noam Chomsky. Chomsky (1975) cautions teachers against passively accepting theory on grounds of authority, real or presumed. He believes that there are certain aspects of language that are innate. Specific parts of the brain, he claims, must be activated for these aspects to be developed. This activation becomes possible when we are exposed to natural language (Chomsky 1975). Hymes (1970) and Halliday (1979) criticize Chomsky for being too restrictive. They claim he fails to include societal aspects of language, proposing that the grammar system should be related to meaning in social contexts and behavioral settings. Such relational learning, according to Hymes (1970) and Halliday (1979), provide greater insights into the language systems.

Breen and Candlin (1979) claim that meaning and knowledge must be shared through communication. They characterize this as shared knowledge explored and modified as a result of conversation. This implies a socialization process where there is a negotiation of potential meanings rejecting the idea that isolated components result in

learning. They argue:

> In a communicative methodology, content ceases to become some external control over learning-teaching procedures. Choosing directions becomes a part of the curriculum itself, and involves negotiation between learners and learners, learners and teachers, and learners and text (Breen and Candlin 1979, 90).

## History of Reading Instruction

*He that ne'er learns his A,B,C*
*Forever will a Blockhead be:*
*But he that learns these letters fair*
*Shall have a Coach to take the Air.*
*(New England Primer ca. 1785)*

During the 1960s, the federal government conducted studies trying to find the best approach to teaching beginning reading. The results of these studies were inconclusive. Virtually every approach had good results in one place and poor results in another. How well a teacher carried out the approach seemed to be a major determinant of how well an approach worked. The study concluded, however, that combination approaches worked better than any single approach (Robinson 1977). In a study conducted by Adams (1990), it was concluded that children -- especially at-risk-children -- need a rich variety of reading and writing experiences, as well as direct instruction in letter-sound patterns. The question, then, should not be which approach, but rather, "How can we organize classrooms so that we 'have it all?'" (Cunningham and Allington 1994, 15).

Cunningham and Allington's study suggests that it is important for classroom teacher researchers to find the most effective ways to teach reading within their particular classroom. Children, as well as teachers, come to school with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Providing a "combination approach" to literacy is essential

because children bring different cultural knowledge, tacit knowledge, and life experiences to school. While it is not possible to clearly determine which children will learn best with any particular approach, it is clear that when a teacher provides multiple routes to the goal of literacy, more children will find a route to take them there (Hall, Prevatte and Cunningham 1994).

If we were to look at the interchange within the classroom, we would see a hermeneutical experience taking place. The interchange is an interchange of interpretations. In traditional models of classroom teaching, teachers have knowledge they wish to transmit to students. Students attempt to grasp the knowledge being transmitted. Teachers present material they have interpreted to be of importance. Not only is what is important being interpreted, but the style in which the teacher chooses to communicate this material suggests an interpretation of the way a child should learn.

With early Western European settlers of the United States came the belief that written language held great importance. Spelling and reading went hand in hand as the first spellers were depositories of the total curriculum. They provided instruction in the three R's, as well as religious training. One of the first books used for instruction was the hornbook. In its beginning stages, it contained only the alphabet, but was expanded to include syllables and religious content. Later, primers, such as *The New England Primer*, were used to promote literacy. The primers usually proceeded from simple to complex, based on the number of syllables and letters (Smith 1965).

In these early days of teaching reading in the United States, professional books, manuals, or contextualized books were unavailable. The methods used were those imported from Great Britain, using reading strategies that usually proceeded from part to whole. Importance was placed on content, rather than methodology with a major source of the content coming from the Bible (Robinson 1977).

From 1776 to 1840 came the unifying of the curriculum.

> Exercises focused on the *right* pronunciation, on patriotic and historical selections, proverbs, moral stories, fables, and so forth, as well as on expressive oral reading (Robinson 1977, 46).

It was at this time that the first readers including phonics were introduced. Robinson (1977) states, "Sounds were taught, letter by letter and syllable by syllable, to stress articulation and pronunciation, as well as to 'correct' dialects" (46). Although the spelling method was still prevalent, a word method gained popularity and the word-to-letter method was introduced, helping to develop a sight vocabulary. Such methods all had one thing in common; they placed emphasis on elocution or public speaking.

*The Pestalozzian Primer* placed emphasis on meaning and thinking. This primer was accepted hesitantly. It incorporated the theory that analysis should follow fluent reading of stories. This was the forerunner of the next phase (Robinson 1977).

The 1840s to the 1880s brought about a search for more effective methods of teaching reading. As the United States became more of a developing nation, the national emphasis was on "producing" intelligent citizens. The content of readers reflected this desire to produce intelligent citizens and included mostly informational readings. It was

Horace Mann who reintroduced the ideas presented in Keagy's *The Pestalozzian Primer* (Robinson 1977). Mann denounced most of the existing methods as failing to give children a chance to think. The Pestalozzian movement stressed the use of all senses and application to meaningful situations, pictures, and materials dealing with objects and experiences familiar to children. Although previous methods of teaching reading were still prevalent, a new awareness of meaning was being introduced. Graded schools were also introduced at this time, as well as the grade leveled McGuffey readers (Smith 1965).

Reading to discover truth and enjoy characters and plots was becoming popular in the United States. Charles W. Eliot, then president of Harvard, suggested substituting original literature works in place of basal readers (Robinson 1977).

Recognition of the increasing number of poor readers in the upper grades who had been trained in a strong phonics program continued to bring about new methods of instruction. The alphabet method had lost popularity, but the wide use of phonics, sound/symbol relationships, and the use of interesting literature continued. Some basal readers were introducing the word method, giving importance to sight vocabulary before phonics was stressed. Larger units were studied before working on phonics. It was during this period that research in the field of children's reading began to develop. Most research was, however, conducted in laboratory settings where investigators looked at the "rate of reading, distinctions between silent and oral reading, and individual differences in reading" (Smith 1965, 155).

With a concern for reading progress, the period of 1910 to 1925 brought forth instruments to measure reading ability. The Gray Standardized Oral Reading Paragraphs were published in 1915 and were soon followed by others. The emphasis towards reading research began to gain momentum. With the tests came a strong emphasis on silent reading. The rise of teaching manuals accelerated, mainly geared towards the teaching of silent reading. This silent reading called for more "seatwork," bringing about flashcards and objective type questions. Concern over children's reading abilities continued to escalate, as a general concern for individual differences increased (Robinson 1977).

Two general philosophies emerged in the period to follow (1925-1935). Robinson (1977) states,

> (1) There is a sequence of skills to be learned by all children, and these can be plotted out in a basic program by authoritative adults. (2) The reading needs of children can best be met through their reasoning processes as they carry out their own purposes and solve their own problems [the activity movement] (51).

The interest in research was accelerated as well. The Twenty-Fourth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education , Part 1 (1925, 9-12), set forth the following objectives:

1. To participate intelligently in the thought life of the world and appreciatively in its recreational activities.

2. To develop strong motives for, and permanent interests in reading that will inspire the present and future life of the reader and provide for the wholesome use of leisure time.

3. To develop the attitudes, habits, and skills that are essential in the various types of reading activities in which children and adults should engage.

Manuals began to become more professional, citing options and supplemental material. Instructional materials became varied. Although readers were the basic, sequence-of-skills programs, supplemental readings containing factual stories, fairy tales and folk tales were being published. Reading instruction was conducted throughout the school day and not during one specific period. A correlation approach combining the disciplines was prominent. Some educators expanded an integration approach. The methods still varied. Although all manuals dealt with phonics, the discrepancy came as to when to teach phonics, before or after words were introduced. The needs of the individuals seemed to dictate the method and program used, with diagnosis and remediation playing an important role. This era saw the term "reading readiness" coined as researchers found many first graders struggling to succeed.

An emphasis towards systematic reading instruction and on reading in contemporary life reflected the period from 1935-1950. The realization that those entering the armed forces could not read well enough to copy their duties alarmed the public. Reading programs began to be instituted in high schools and colleges. There was an upswing in the number of professional books regarding reading, and manuals accompanying basals became very thorough in nature. The basals became more interrelational. The concept of meeting individual needs remained; however, but was discussed more than achieved. The emphasis on remediation however, was growing (Robinson 1977).

As technology and knowledge expanded in the period from 1950 to 1965, so did the field of reading. Basals continued to decrease the average number of words introduced at

each level, used repetition, and began to become conscious of multicultural readers. Individualized reading was at a high. Linguistics was being added to the program. The programs became eclectic, incorporating reading skills discovered or developed over the years. Although critical reading skills were discussed more often than they were taught, vocabulary and study skills seemed to be universal. Doctoral studies began to focus on the reading processes in an effort to get away from the test results (Robinson 1977).

1965 to 1976 found a push back towards phonics as a means to improve reading instruction. Almost all of the approaches were now visible along with a strong cry for more phonics. These cries ignored research, such as Bond and Dykstra (1967), that concluded the major factor to be the teacher and the elements in the learning situation.

With the 1980s, a strong emphasis on a "whole language" approach to reading emerged. This method incorporated reading across the curriculum and put a strong emphasis on literature.

In the 1990s, a move toward what is being called a "realistic" trend in teaching reading has emerged. This movement incorporates phonics, reading, writing, skills, and literature within an integrated approach. As we look at the history of reading instruction, it becomes evident that most methods have been tried and tried again, both in isolation and in integrated methods, yet concern about children and adults who cannot read and write continues. Bond and Dykstra (1967) concluded that regardless of approach, the teacher plays the most important role in reading success. What role then does the teacher play to create this successful classroom?

## A Critical Look at Reading Instruction

To look at reading in a critical manner is to look at skills as a way to enable students, not only to be better students today, but also better citizens tomorrow. For this to happen there must also be an illumination of the possibilities of understanding.

The fundamentals of teaching reading have changed many times over the years. Phonics has been "in" and "out" and literature has taken a front seat and a back seat. The two approaches have been combined and separated. Is this constant change necessary? Beneficial?

Research has shown that classroom teachers play a very important role in a child's education. For students often referred to as "at risk," the teacher may be the pivotal factor in their success or failure. Cunningham and Allington (1994) believe the teacher is the most important factor in the success or failure of at-risk children in the schools. They write:

> Classroom teachers are simply the most important factor in the success or failure of at risk children in our schools. Classroom teachers are responsible for the minute-by-minute instruction. The decisions they make and the kind of instruction and support that they provide makes the difference between success and failure . . . For many at-risk children, classroom teachers are their last and their best hope for school and life success (1).

If a child's classroom experience is to be successful, their interests and concerns must be taken into consideration. Children must be engaged with the text and curriculum, and multiple perspectives need to be explored.

Cole (in Moll 1990) describes four distinctive types of educational activity found in most educational settings in the past, as well as in current systems of education. He

believes that formal schooling uses a "distinctive mediational means, written symbol systems" (104). Cole finds writing to be a necessary, but not sufficient, explanation of schooling effects. A second similar distinction is found in the way participation is structured and the form of discourse that takes place in schools. Mehan, Cole, and Moll (in Moll 1990) write,

> Instructional discourse differs from other ways in which adults and children speak in both its structure and its content. The central goals of instructional discourse are to give children information about the content of the curriculum and feedback about their efforts while providing teachers with information about their students' progress (105).

This teacher initiation-student reply-evaluation sequence results in a type of questioning that is rarely found outside of school. This type of teaching is in contrast to natural instruction. Imbedding instruction in natural ways, giving children meaning for what they are learning, as well as making them responsible for their own learning, is a key strategy in teaching literacy (Moll 1990). Although many educators embrace the idea of natural instruction, even educated adults fall back on known practices.

The need for students to see the connectedness across the curriculum is also important. Even more important is the need for them to see how this knowledge relates to their own lives, future, and into the making of a better life for them and their society. Three educational factors have relevance to learning behavior in a wide range of context, writing, curriculum and language. Writing is a medium that aids in many settings. It is used in the home, work place, and in securing everyday needs. Curriculum gives one a broad sense to better understand historical situations, as well as a broad knowledge base enabling one to be a more effective problem solver. It also allows intelligent discourse to

take place. Language carries with it a cultural heritage. There is meaning embedded in language carrying it far beyond the classroom (Gallagher 1992). One cannot escape the need for language.

As a child enters the world, they are emersed in language. It may be verbal or non-verbal language, but language surrounds all of us in our everyday lives. "The human being encounters the world and everything in it through language" (Gallagher 1992, 6).

Here, negotiation for meaning becomes the central issue. Flexibility, on the part of the teacher, student, and syllabus to negotiate meaning, becomes paramount (Gallagher 1992). It is important for children to know what they are trying to learn and how it is useful to them. Children must see how reading relates to their lives today and in the future. If they fail to make this connection, they will not have the same drive and motivation to learn.

Understanding the disconnect between technical knowledge and moral knowledge can enable students to see new information in light of their present circumstances, rather than as an isolated bit of information. When information can be seen in this way, it becomes useful for life and can be applied to each new situation in a moral sense. Since moral knowledge involves one getting to know himself, each new situation is seen in a different light. If children can see how information may be useful to them today, as well as in the future, they have an added motivation to learn, encounter, explore, and change.

## Conclusion

This review of literature reveals not only the difficulty in developing a consensus as to how reading and writing should be taught, but what should be taught. Many insist on teaching technical and practical knowledge while giving little attention to the emancipatory interest. It is the emancipatory interest, however, that enables one to look beyond the printed word to moral action. When the emancipatory interest is ignored, individuals fail to recognize the audible silences hidden in the curriculum. When children are taught to accept as fact all they read, they are not challenged to question "what is" and move beyond "what is" towards transformation and new possibilities of being. Through critical hermeneutical dialogue among students and teachers, where a genuine conversation can take place, prompting action, teachers can promote change in schools—change that opens up new avenues and worlds for themselves and all children.

# CHAPTER THREE

# METHODOLOGY

## Critical Research Methodology

> *The use of critical hermeneutical phenomenology, studying persons, is essential to this research. It begins in the lifeworld of the participants. It encourages a certain attentive awareness to the details and seemingly trivial dimensions of our everyday educational lives (Van Manen 1990, 8).*

The proceeding chapters outline the need for effective literacy programs to incorporate teacher research. Critical teacher research, however, is not just conversation, but reflection and conversation with change as its goal. If we were to merely look at the history of reading reform, discuss it, and even employ new and combined methods, we would simply be reentering a cycle started in the 1880s. This chapter focuses on the participants, the setting, and the process of this research. Pseudonyms have been used for those named in the research as well as the school in which the research took place.

## The School Context

This research was conducted at a middle class, multi-ethnic, suburbia elementary school located in the Silicon Valley. The research took place between September 1996 and June 1997. Located in the north side of the suburban city, the school serves a multi-ethnic population. The annual report of the school lists the total enrollment of 477

students with 18 classes, Kindergarten through fifth grade, and two Special Day classes. The population is described as 34% White, 32 % Hispanic, 22 % Asian/Pacific Islander, 8 % Black, 3 % Filipino and 1 % American Indian.

One of the school's goals, identified by the School Improvement Plan (SIP), has been to improve Language Arts by implementing a literature-based language arts program. This is consistent with the school mission goal of implementing staff development and follow-up activities that support the School Based Coordinated Plan in the area of Language Arts/Writing. Arranging for the entire faculty to attend REACH training before the 1996-1997 school year was one of the activities implemented by Principal Flowers to help achieve this school-wide goal. It was with this goal in mind that this research project came about.

**Implementation of the REACH Program**

A movement towards a "holistic" approach to literacy instruction (which included phonemic awareness) caused many principals in the district to seek in-service training for faculties centered on the REACH program. The program employed not only the teacher, but the home/school community, in order to effectively teach core literature

After attending the REACH training, I wanted to investigate how REACH methods played themselves out within the classroom, and how teachers, used to a textbook approach to teaching, might adapt to a new style of teaching.

## The Research Project

After attending a three-day literacy training, I thought of the many in-service days, classes, and workshops I had attended in the past. What happened after the training was over? Where did teacher accountability come in? Did classrooms really change? Did teachers change? These questions prompted me to form a critical research group with other first grade teachers to see how our teaching was being affected by the REACH training and how critical dialogue throughout the year might enable us to approach our work in more informed ways.

Two weeks after school started, our first grade teachers' group met and talked freely about how we were implementing the processes learned at the training and how it was changing us. We agreed to allow electronic tape recording of each session. I participated as both a researcher and participant.

## Profiles of the Participants

Casandra Littletone

Casandra had taught kindergarten for four years and first grade for six years. Five of those years were spent teaching in a sheltered English class. A dedicated teacher, she was often viewed as highly structured and even inflexible. The many hours she spent attending workshops and seminars on a regular basis reflected her deep desire for constant improvement in her teaching. She served on the District Cultural Diversity Council, as well as facilitating district workshops on second language learners. She was a

very willing participant and became quite enthusiastic about the research as she came to view it as a joint adventure.

Anne Alharts:

Anne, a veteran teacher, has taught for 20 years. Although she has taught across the grade levels, she has spent the last ten years of her teaching career in a first grade class. She was well poised, easy going, and has developed many exciting units in her years as a first grade teacher. As with many teachers who have taught the same grade level for several years, she struggled at first with the idea of how a new program would fit into her curriculum. Although she had this struggle, she did remain open and willing to give it her best try.

Sara Myers

Sara, a quiet, well-poised young women, was a new teacher not only to the school but also to the profession. She taught second grade for a year at her previous school before joining the faculty at Gomez. She was beginning her first year in first grade. Entering a new school and a new grade presented unknown challenges for Sara. She was willing to enter the research, not only for the benefit of my project, but to become better acquainted as to who the other participants were professionally.

Julianne Gibson

Julianne had joined the staff at Gomez the year before as a kindergarten teacher. Her move to the first grade for the 1996-1997 school year came about only one month before the school year began. An energetic, caring teacher with creative ideas she was working

on a master's degree at Santa Clara University. Julianne was a team player and very willing to participate in the research project.

Cathy Thornton

As the researcher, I also chose to be a participant in the research group. With six years of experience in upper elementary, I had limited exposure to the primary grades. My experience included one-half year in kindergarten and one-half year job sharing in a second grade. During the past two and one-half years I substituted in the district on a regular basis, a majority of that time at Gomez Elementary School. Although I was new to the school as a full-time teacher, I had worked extensively with Anne and Casandra as a substitute teacher and participated as a parent on the interviewing team the year Julianne was hired.

Although we were all at different levels in our experience in teaching first grade literacy, we all found ourselves in a state of flux after being presented with a new philosophy of reading and the challenge of incorporating this philosophy into the classroom. We decided a support system was needed if the implementation was going to be effective in changing the lives of children, and if we, as teacher participants, were to enter the hermeneutical circle and come out transformed to enter the circle again.

## Methodology of Critical Hermeneutic Project

At the end of the first meeting, we all agreed that we would meet at least two other times this year as a whole group to maintain our focus, to learn from each other, and to discuss the program as a whole. These "scheduled" meetings were not to take the place

of our lunchroom conversations, after school drop-in conversations, or "help" sessions. During these discussions, we would be concentrating on what importance a community of conversation support plays in the successful implementation of a new literacy program. We would also look into how critical conversation professionally effects individual teacher growth in the classroom, as well as how a critical hermeneutical classroom effects the students. Although the participants were not asked to maintain journals, several were quick to relay their new findings on a regular basis. Van Manen (1990) believes that conducting hermeneutic interviews, in which the participants invest more than a passing interest in the research project but in which they are willingly involved themselves, causes them to begin to care about the subject and about the research question.

## Critical Qualitative Research

The role of this research has been to gain insights into the first grade teachers' understandings and change processes as they embarked upon yet another "new" literacy program. This research also looks at teacher change as critical conversation and retrospection takes place throughout the year. Each participant was encouraged not only to give information, but also to actively participate in the process of examining taken-for-granted beliefs, audible silences, and the role of peer support. This research was aimed at not only looking at what "is" but what "should be."

The social, dialogic nature of this research made the employment of qualitative methods necessary. Dewey gave great importance to the role of the teacher as researcher (Kinchloe 1991). As researchers, teachers listen to the students, they look at the

phenomenological world of their participants, as well as their own, and they encourage liminality. These practices are further developed as empowered teachers work together. As we engaged in this research, we became highly aware of the confrontation between social vision and nature, educational theory, and how we conduct our daily professional lives. Teachers are encouraged to construct their own views, freeing them of those now imposed upon them. As critical research took place, radical action also took place. The role of the "expert" came into question or was at times negated, the role of the teacher was seen as that of an active political agent, and the school is seen as an agent of democracy able to include and negotiate (Kincheloe 1991).

## Dialogic Retrospection

Dialogic retrospection as described by Kieffer (1981) is a form of participatory research and was a necessary aspect of this research. This research was designed not to simply retrieve data, but to empower teachers and encourage change. The research was not collaboration, as the participants were not engaged in the organization of the research. They were however, active participants. The research was designed to give personal ownership to the participants. The dialogic model created a joint elaboration of personal meanings, as well as provoking personal growth (Kieffer 1981). It was the goal of this research to apprehend "the emergence of personally meaningful involvement over time" (Kieffer 1981, 8). It was the hope that the participants would be immersed in interactive dialogue that would be transforming, causing transcendence. The participatory setting

gave a sense of power to participants, and enabled them to gain a "critical consciousness" empowering them to view their world in a critical manner.

Kieffer (1981) describes empowerment as having three primary dimensions:

> a) development of a more positive and potent sense of self, b) construction of more critical comprehension of the web of social and political relations which comprise one's experienced environment, and c) cultivation of resources and strategies, or functional competence, for efficacious attainment of personal and collective socio-political goals (7).

Based upon Kieffer's (1981) use of dialogic retrospection, the participants were involved in the research process as follows:

1. Participants were informed of the research and invited to participate. Confidentiality issues and consent forms were discussed.

2. Participants were interviewed twice, according to Kieffer's (1981) model. The interviews were then transcribed, returned to each participant, and reviewed with the interviewer and participant.

3. Conversations, observations, and reflections were documented within 24 hours by the researcher.

4. Second interviews were obtained to discuss issues that emerged in the transcriptions. This gave way to a deeper level of discussion.

Within this research, participants were viewed as change agents involved in a changing curriculum. Kieffer (1981) believes that as the researcher I play a more active role in the research, the research becomes less subjective and gains greater objectivity, and understandings are seen as "tentative interpretations throughout the research process and are consistently referred back to the participants for responses and refinement" (Kieffer 1981, 14).

## Observation and Conversation Logs

As personal observations were made within the classrooms, in the staff room, and in formal and informal meetings, these observations were kept in a research log along with a personal log of the growth I was experiencing as the researcher. The research log contained not only observations I made, but ideas and thoughts related by the participants in various situations. It was not uncommon for one of the participants to ask if I had my pen and pencil ready, she had something to share regarding our research. Through these formal and informal observations, insights were gained into the change process the participants were undergoing. Conversational interviews were chosen as one method of data collection. In the interviews the purpose was not "to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to evaluate as the term is normally used" (Seidman 1991). The purpose was instead to gain insights into our own understandings.

## Narratives

> *Arguments convince one of their truths, stories of their lifelikeness. (Jalongo, Isenberg and Gerbracht 1995, 10)*

Narratives played a vital role in this research, and gained their richness as they were shared in a safe environment. The use of the narrative method rendered life experiences in meaningful ways. As teachers we became the storytellers and characters in the research. Jalongo, Isenberg, and Gerbracht (1995) write "narrative preserves traditions, yet leads to the creation of new stories" (7). Narratives can be seen as a mirror to the past that can lead to transformation and a window when used to examine them. They delve

for meaning as authentic pieces are put together, reflected upon, interpreted, and responded to. Although teachers are not infallible, their practical knowledge, or stories, are just as important as an "experts" source of evaluation. Narratives allowed the research to create its own path, a freedom or "chaos," as Doll states, that was left to the researcher (Doll 1993). Although research questions were formulated before each meeting, the participants had freedom to take their own path, sometimes messy and definitely not neatly packaged. In a post-modern view, Drake and Ryan (1994 ) see the narrative as a vehicle for social change, a view shared by Kincheloe (1991), Shor (1992), and Bowers (1987).

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

Working with the data meant organizing what was seen and heard to make sense of what was learned. After the audio-recorded data was transcribed, it was reviewed for emerging themes. The language was analyzed, looking for evidence of transformation. Before the data could be analyzed in an objective manner, it first was necessary for me, the researcher, to examine my own taken-for-granted beliefs. Bowers (1987) states:

> When we become aware of our taken-for-granted experience, or the categories and assumptions we use as the rules for interpreting experience, there is often such a sense of familiarity, even inevitability, it is often difficult to generate much enthusiasm or concern for making the intellectual effort to examine them" (32).

With this in mind, I had to pose hypotheses, develop theories and link my story to other stories.

Analytic files kept on each interview, observation, conversation, and on the readings pertaining to the research question, were coded for further investigation. As the files

were color coded according to particular themes that arose, a further analysis to narrow the topic took place. Like-minded pieces were broken down into further subcodes and placed into various data clumps that represented a "meaningful sequence that contributed to the chapters or sections of this manuscript" (Glesne and Peshkin 1992, 133). The data was, at points, rearranged during the process to accommodate emerging themes. Although each central theme was given its own code, some codes were merged over and over as the analysis progressed and the data was reread and reinterpreted (Glesne and Peshkin 1992). In this research, I used colored highlight markers to begin the coding. As chapters and subtitles arose, I incorporated numbers and color codes to correspond with the various subsections. The constant revisiting of the data encouraged me to see changes in actions, attitudes, and philosophies of the participants, helping me shape the development of the research.

# CHAPTER FOUR:

# DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

## Introduction

This chapter presents and analyzes the discourse that took place among the first grade teachers at Gomez Elementary School, located in the Silicon Valley, as they implemented the REACH literacy program into their curriculum. Looking at the community of conversation that took place among these teachers during the implementation, as well as individual changes in the teachers involved, the data also explored ways in which this research changed the dynamics of classrooms. Additionally, I examined how the process of conducting critical hermeneutic research affected the students and their understandings.

### Beginning of the School Year

Summer vacation was cut short for the teachers at Gomez Elementary School. Dr. Flowers, the principal of Gomez Elementary School, had arranged a three-day training on the teaching of literacy, to be held the week before school began. It was this training, and the implementation of the REACH Model, that was the initial backdrop for the conversations that united the first grade teachers at Gomez Elementary School during the 1996-1997 school year.

The entire faculty had been involved in training and preparation for launching the new process. We felt that many of our children lacked the literacy skills necessary to be

successful in school and in society. The participants believed that good literacy skills could play an important role in helping to shape children into responsible citizens, citizens able to make a difference in their communities. As primary level teachers, we were especially anxious to give our children a good start in the beginning school years.

## Conversation Begins

Excitement still filled the air as the first few weeks of school had come and gone. Students and teachers were happy to be back in school. The students were glad to see their friends. The teachers were ready to try out the new skills they had acquired over the summer in various training sessions. One source of training shared by all of the teachers at Gomez Elementary School was the REACH training. The first grade teachers had started to implement a few of the strategies taught at the REACH training into their curriculum and were now gathering to discuss their thoughts, feelings, and questions.

As I walked across the now vacant playground late in the day, I passed through the open hallway and entered Room 2, Casandra Littleton's first grade classroom. I had been in this room many times before as a substitute teacher. It was always an intriguing, interesting room, orderly yet inviting. This bright, cheery room was the gathering place for our initial group conversation. I arrived early to make sure everything was in place. I wanted this first interview to be valuable not only to me, the interviewer, but also to Casandra, Anne, Julianne, and Sara. Everything had to be in place, tape recorder set up, chairs arranged, and, of course, treats as the centerpiece. One by one the group came down the outside corridor and entered the room talking, questioning, excited, and yes, a

little tired from a full day of school. What had the first few weeks of school been like in each classroom? What had each teacher been doing? Each was excited to hear what was working for her colleagues, what may not be working, and what future plans were envisioned.

We gathered around those small, cozy, first grade desks put together to make a table. After an initial greeting, the small talk died down. I put forth the initial question, "How do you see this "new" program fitting into the total learning process in your classroom"? The buzz of conversation began as the tape recorder started to role.

## Re-thinking Past Literacy/Reading Practices

Although teaching first grade reading was not new to Anne and Casandra, some of the strategies presented at the REACH training were new to them. The training caused them to re-think their reading/literacy program. Anne and Casandra came into the process with open minds. Anne, the most veteran teacher of the group, had her own ideas about teaching reading. She felt she had been successful in the past, but was willing to learn from "rookies" who were trying the program as their first and only attempt to teach literacy to this group of first graders. After the initial question, Anne was the first to speak. With her slow, thoughtful speech, she began thinking out loud, as she often did.

> Well, I was just thinking that, for instance, some of my kids do need to review their letter sounds. I was thinking of doing the morning message (several sentences written by the teacher for the class to correct together), for instance, in reading groups, focusing on ...well I guess this is what my situation is. When I am writing the morning message, I will go "Hum, I wonder what that starts with?" I have the high kids who respond immediately, and then I will have the other kids who will go, "Huh"? So that is why I was thinking of switching, but I don't know. What do you guys think?

Casandra, a confident veteran teacher, responded,

> For me, my class takes a long time doing morning message and I don't want to stop them because they are still totally into it and excited. To do it twice in one day would take a lot of my staggered time.

Casandra was concerned that the first and last hour of the day when she had only half of her children for small group reading instruction (staggered reading) would not be the time to do the morning message. As the conversation continued, Casandra expressed the need for more time in the day.

Julianne had taught kindergarten last year. She sat just a little taller as Casandra credited the need for more time to last year's kindergarten teachers. Casandra claimed the children coming into her first grade class had more exposure to literature and journal writing in kindergarten. She felt this helped give them the confidence to begin writing earlier in the year than children in the past.

Even with the enriched skills the kindergarten classes were receiving, the school day still did not hold enough hours to implement everything inherent in the REACH program along with the other first grade subject matter. Anne expressed,

> I am looking at all of the things we have to do like morning message, journal writing, author's chair, reading out loud, writing in math time, regular math time, shared reading, the activities with books, and silent reading. You know that's a lot to do! It's hard to know what to pull back on.

Her remarks echoed the feelings expressed by the group as we embarked on a new program. It was yet another beginning.

Casandra and Julianne then shifted the discussion to writer's workshop. Casandra traditionally had the children take an entry from their journal, correct it with them, and then she would write the final draft in booklet form for the children to illustrate. The workshop presenter believed Casandra should let the children write the final copy of their booklets to share with the class. Casandra believed this bogged down the process. She explained the process, "The children write their stories. We edit it together. I write the final copy in booklets for them. They illustrate it independently and then read it aloud to the class." After discussion with the group, she re-examined her strategy. Casandra had chosen to discard the advice of an "expert" presenter and go with what worked for her and her class.

Being one of the "rookie" participants in the research, I found myself listening carefully to these veterans sorting through the process. It was intriguing to hear them think out loud and discuss the "new" and the "old." It was encouraging to hear them combine the "new" with the "old," not discard practices that had worked for them in the past.

## A Support System

We were only in the beginning stages of our initial meeting and I already felt included in the group. There we sat, the veteran teachers and the rookies. The circle around the table was closed with no beginning or ending, no first or last. The feeling of inferiority I felt as the conversation began was dissipating. My colleagues were veterans, not the experts. They were supporters, not critics. I did not find myself overwhelmed

with the process of teaching a new grade. Instead I felt a strong support system was giving me the confidence I needed. The other teachers were ready and willing to help without giving the impression that they had all of the answers. This reflected Breen and Candlin's (1979) belief that conversation is an important part of knowledge. A language environment was built that established boundaries and provided linguistic foundation that made thought and communication possible (Bowers 1987). These experienced teachers' own questioning of the ideas and techniques they had used in the past made the playing ground feel a lot more level. We were all at a point of new beginnings. Anne felt the sands shifting in this new paradigm. She expressed, "This is really a paradigm shift for me. I mean I feel that I am not exactly sure where everything is going to go." With this shifting came more questioning.

## Questionings

Why was this program so important? Where was all of this change leading? What was around the corner? The two veteran teachers questioned what practices they should hold onto, and what practices they would let go by the wayside. Would they embrace all of these newly presented techniques or fragments of them? Many of the questions were faced not only by Anne and Casandra, but the rest of the team as well.

Many of our conversations were filled with questioning. No one claimed the role of the expert. Each viewed herself as a learner. Gallagher (1992) states that it is the back and forth of dialogue that enables genuine interchange to take place.

As the conversation continued, we began questioning the use of thematic units. Casandra began questioning the way she had used thematic units in the past. Her file drawers were filled with crafty, cute ideas to teach units on dinosaurs, weather, bears, and other themes. Was teaching the difference between a polar bear and a grizzly bear of value to her limited English students, or should she concentrate more on their world, their individual needs? This constituted a move from her traditional teaching methods. Casandra shared the story of a little boy, Ivan, who had very, very limited English. He needed to experience natural conversation while in school if he was to learn the English language. Casandra comments,

> Ivan doesn't need to know what the difference between a grizzly and a polar bear is right now, he needs to learn to read, he needs to talk. I think, you know, we need to give them time to talk and time to interact. That's why silent reading in my classroom this year is no longer silent. If we want them to become readers, they need time to interact with the book and with each other about the book.

If she was going to use thematic units, Casandra felt that her priorities had to be rearranged. The difference this year would be to move from having the thematic units drive the curriculum to having the children's experiences drive the thematic units. Casandra was voicing a move away from planning units by herself, based on what she wanted the children to study or learn, to looking for and anticipating the needs and wants of the children. What did they need to know? What did they want to know? Casandra exclaimed, "That's the way it should be. That is why I am buying into it." Her comments reflect the conclusions of Habermas' (1971) notion that knowledge is dependent on its context and interests. Emancipatory knowledge was being employed in

the program. The students were connected to the learning. There was a connection between what was being taught and their lives. Kinchloe (1991) believes that it is this emancipatory interest that connects the act of knowing with the immediate utilization of knowledge.

## Inclusion of Student Input

Julianne made investigating her children's interests a part of her teaching experience. As her class gathered around her at the front of the room, she asked the children what they wanted to learn in first grade. As they expressed their ideas, ranging from dinosaurs to space, she listed them on chart paper for the class to evaluate and consider. Julianne used this list to plan her year around the children's interests. She felt the REACH program allowed her to incorporate their interests with the various aspects of the program. Through the morning message she could write about an interest or theme the children had listed. The children would then write in their journals using their own ideas or ideas expressed in the morning message. She would share literature pieces on the subject through guided reading, shared reading, and individual reading. Julianne had started to think about incorporating the process into her curriculum along with thematic teaching.

Sara also posed the question to her children one morning. She began by reading a literature piece, *Franklin Goes to School.* Following the reading, she asked the children what they wanted to learn in first grade.

> A ton of kids wanted to learn about animals. They came up with all these things and I didn't say anything. First they came up with reading and writing and then religions, animals, fish, and colors. The themes seem to peak their interests. If you take the themes and incorporate them into the REACH program, it could be interesting.

Adding thematic units to the many ideas that had been presented in the REACH training, however, became a bit overwhelming for Casandra.

> I am looking at all the things we have to do like morning message, journal writing, author chair, reading out loud, writing and math time, regular math time, shared reading, activities with books silent reading, you know, that's a lot! I don't know, it's really hard to know and I guess to me that's why I feel like I need to pull back on some other things.

Anne responded with her solution of incorporating themes according to the seasons.

> In September I do harvesting, October - scary things, November – Thanksgiving and things like that. I kind of involve what's fun, or the season or what's happening in the month. The children enjoy the themes. Taking out the themes altogether would be taking out the "fun" of learning.

The teachers sensed a need for conversation if growth was to occur, not only among the teachers, but also among the students. This would mean the classroom would be a place of movement, sound, interaction, and uncertainty. The children would not be seated in nice neat rows all day, quietly doing individual work. The classroom would need to be set up in groups conducive for conversation, and children would be encouraged to move around the room to find information, words, help. Questioning would be encouraged. Teacher talk would be limited. Curriculum would be interactive. Conversation would be central in these classrooms set up for growth. This type of classroom could seem chaotic to a casual observer. This uncertainty encouraged our need

for conversation within the group. This type of classroom, we decided, would encourage the emancipatory interests of the children (Kinchloe 1991).

Through conversation within our group, we came to support this sense of ordered chaos within the classroom. It gave us power to hear from one another that the children did not need to be in their seats, quietly working all day, in order for learning to take place. This would also shift control away from the teacher and give more of the decision making process to students. Subsequently, students became the active learners Gallagher (1992) talks about. Gallagher (1992) believes learning takes place when there is an interchange of ideas, words, thoughts, or gestures among two or more people. This is not a one-way transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the student, but a mutual interchange where the students play a major role in their own learning. Casandra states,

> I think REACH was important for our school because it made literacy more significant to the students. They see reading as a fun way to learn. They see the link between reading and writing. They are more motivated to write because they see it as a form of communication.

The teachers were willing to share ideas and materials. Julianne offered her extensive listening center library she had inherited from a retired teacher. Casandra was interested in incorporating a listening center but lacked the recorder and headphones. Through investigation we found her a tape recorder that would hold four headphones. I happened to have four extra headphones housed in my classroom. Julianne found that after she read a book to the students as a class, the children were eager to go to the listening center and listen to the tape and read along with a book in front of them. This

sharing of ideas led to the sharing of materials, time, and encouragement in the beginning phases of the school year.

## Middle of the Year

Although teaching reading with new methods clouded each teacher's vision in the beginning, the implementation of the program shifted the focus to the children, their world, and their visions. The children were encouraged to see beyond the literal printed word. Knowledge was deobjectified as students began to see that this information was handed down by human beings (Bowers 1987). This is a difficult process, since humans often tend to see knowledge as it was passed down to them in an objectified manner. Before this could happen, we needed to realize that the curriculum was objectified. Once the areas in the curriculum were identified as objectified, the next step was to help the children see the human authorship behind the information they read. The teachers had to make a conscious effort to recognize the objectification in curriculum and to help students to learn to recognize it as well. A closer look at the printed word fit into the REACH literacy plan.

### Encouraging Children to Be Critical Readers

The concepts promoted in the REACH plan of teaching literacy continued to guide much of our thinking. Reading became not only a subject to teach, but also a way to "see the world through another person's eyes." As Casandra put it,

> Reading aids children in seeing the world through another person's eyes. They can see different areas of the world. As we read a story, I like to encourage the kids to see different ways of solving a character's dilemma.

What were the children "seeing" through these discussions? They were learning to see beyond the printed word, to critically look at writing in a deeper sense. The students were beginning to see beyond their tacit knowledge to an emancipatory knowledge. Their knowledge of what the printed word really meant was being expanded (Bowers 1987). Bowers believes the tacit knowledge of the students is an area in which they are unaware. Since the tacit knowledge of individuals is the area of life that is embedded in the culture of individuals, it is not a conscious area recognized in one's being. To move beyond tacit knowledge to emancipatory knowledge, one must be able to recognize the structures in their life that dictate their thoughts and behaviors.

Through discussions, Casandra was not only becoming aware of her own tacit knowledge, but the tacit knowledge of her children. Casandra's children discussed the houses found in books they read. Most of these children lived in apartments that looked much different than the pictures of the houses in books. The spacious front and back yards were missing, a bedroom for every member of the family was not present. Living in an apartment meant that owning a family dog was not permitted. The books had reified the traditional family dwelling. Not only had information been presented as the way life was, but the presence of materials presenting life as these children were experiencing was absent from the mainstream curriculum. The phenomenological world of these children was not present. Bowers (1987) believes this is the first principle that should be incorporated into the process of socialization. The knowledge being presented had been objectified. It was being presented as the way of life.

Reading books not only meant reading what was there, but what was implied or missing. Casandra's children began to feel free to mention these absences of certain aspects of their life in their reading. Julianne too was becoming aware of the silences found in children's literature.

## Recognizing Audible Silences

Throughout the conversations that took place during the year, the audible silences hidden in the curriculum became more obvious to several of the participants in the research. Bowers (1987) describes these "audible silences" as an area of human experience silenced by society, either because of a lack of communicative competence or by choice, hidden in the curriculum. These became more obvious to several of us. Once you have the language to name something, it becomes difficult to talk about it without naming it. The only way I could adequately discuss the absence of critical issues within the curriculum, issues that were not expressed for particular reasons, was to use the term "audible silences." Bowers (1987) claims these areas of complex and problematic experience are not represented in the vocabulary or explanation given to students, but are simply ignored as if they did not exist. It was through our discussions of these areas that the term "audible silence" became known to my colleagues. We talked about audible silences and we named them. We found audible silences in testing materials, literature, science, and social studies. Each of these areas presented curriculum that was silent about sensitive issues such as race, gender, ethnicity, social status, economics, and education. There was a power in the naming. It was not the power sensed from using an

unfamiliar word, it was giving a name to an issue you sensed, felt, but had not been able to articulate.

Casandra and Julianne's sheltered English classes included a high population of second language learners. Each of these teachers became increasingly aware of the audible silences speaking to their "minority" students through literature and the curriculum. Informal discussions surrounding the issue of audible silences in the curriculum began to occur more often as we met and talked informally. Although our two sheltered English first grade teachers were aware that our school served a large second language population, they had not been as sensitive to the silences regarding minorities within the curriculum. As we claimed the language, we gained the eyes to see the different cultures, income groups, and handicaps within the classrooms.

Casandra had a physically handicapped child in her classroom this year. As she watched Martha sit in her wheelchair daily, not able to move around freely as the other children, she became acutely aware of the absence of literature portraying children with disabilities. Pieces that were included in the curriculum only addressed the handicap; they failed to portray the children as normal citizens in an everyday world with something to contribute to society.

Gaining the language to name the audible silences not only made a difference in discussions, but in the simple reading of literature to the children. Casandra, Julianne, and I were especially impacted by the unveiling of audible silences. We discussed the heightened awareness we had of the "individual" children within the classroom. How did

they experience and understand the story, plot, and language? Reading a story now took on new meaning. Not only did we read stories where family life was portrayed, but discussions followed regarding what constituted a family, a house, and a home. Did George Washington and Abraham Lincoln ever do anything wrong? Could only men be policemen? Our children were now becoming engaged in the process. They were being enabled to think critically.

## Reified Curriculum

It was February, Julianne was reading books on George Washington and Abraham Lincoln to her class. They were very simple books reifying these men as perfect models for the children to follow. The books caused one to lose sight of the fact that a human author was behind the printed word. The information presented appeared objectively real, reified, or the "Truth" (Bowers 1987). Much of the detail involved in the lives of these famous American heroes was omitted. What the books did include was the glamour surrounding these men. They were heroes held up as doing no wrong. After several informal discussions regarding audible silences in children's literature, Julianne decided not to let this opportunity slip away.

> I was reading these books to my children, realizing that the children probably believed these men never did anything wrong. They don't show anything bad about these men. It wouldn't have to be really bad, just show they were human like these kids. The kids probably think these men were so perfect, they could never be like this person. The children need to know that these men made mistakes too, no one's perfect and everyone makes mistakes.

Julianne's conversation became passionate as she recalled her education.

> I was in college when I first remember reading books that were real. In elementary, junior high and high school everything I read was presented as the way things were. There was no questioning of information or the author's voice. In college, I explored more areas and events became more real. I learned not to believe everything I read. I believe these children should learn this now.

The focus on the children gave Julianne a better understanding of why she was teaching reading. It was through these discussions that new insights became known, and acknowledged as something to explore and investigate. The purpose of teaching literacy was now being discussed as an emancipatory issue.

## Developing Communicative Competent Students

Julianne saw her teaching of reading as an avenue to enable her students to become communicatively competent. Not only did they need reading to survive in school, but also be able to communicate with those around them, to be more interesting, well-rounded people. Literacy was a key to expanding their interests and exploring new avenues of communication so that their voices could be heard. Implicit in this act was an appropriation of power. Language gives power. Having the language to name what is becomes a powerful tool to those who use it effectively. Heidegger (in Gallagher 1992) believes language is so essential to human existence that it pervades all human activitics. Secondly, language controls us more than we control language. Language is a major key to our existence.

During morning message time each day, Julianne tried to incorporate something relevant to her students' lives or to her own. She often found that opening up her

personal world to her students sparked added interest. Through opening up a window to her life, her students could peek through into the private life of this mysterious teacher's life.

She found the key to be relational. The more she could write about experiences that related to individual students, the class as a whole, or her own personal life, the more she saw her students' interest peek and their journal writing take wings. Relational writing seemed to enrich her students' writing. Something they could see, feel, question, and respond to and receive feedback about. Meaning was given to their writing. Experiences were valued. The child's phenomenological world was taken into consideration. By going beyond thoughts and feelings, Bowers believes learning is given the essential ingredient for meaning (Bowers 1987).

Casandra commented that "reading gives knowledge and gives empathy towards fellow man. Knowledge and empathy free us to be contributing members in society." These teachers were becoming critical hermeneutical thinkers and empowering their students to do the same. "A critical-democratic teacher comes to class with a structure and then reinvents that structure with the students according to their learning, language, conditions, and interests." (Shor 1992, 177). Meaning was made as the students brought their world into the classroom.

Deobjectifying knowledge not only afforded power to the children, but they were learning to use their own writing skills to express themselves. Julianne saw this as the

teaching of creativity and imagination. As confidence was developed, the children's writings expanded.

> Once they have learned to write and are comfortable with writing, they can expand their writing with the knowledge that they have learned from reading, expanding their creativity and their skills. I think reading also ties into the writing and so it expands their whole being.

Julianne also saw reading as a lifelong skill. She believed reading was essential to get along in life for driving, to read a newspaper, and to read and sign a contract for a job. Agreeing with her, I believe reading goes outside the classroom. It is needed to function in our society and it adds to the communicative competence of the children enabling them to go further in life. Reading a wide variety of materials expands one's horizon and allows us to explore different interests and grow as people.

What Julianne and I expressed was an interest not only in teaching the children to read, but also to become enabled citizens of our society able to make intelligent choices because they have been able to engage in a broad background of knowledge though the printed word. This process was not seen as a one-time interest being explored, but a continual process.

## The Spiraling Circle

Just as we began to see reading as a spiraling process expanding the children's horizons in a constant fashion, we also found our own learning a never-ending process. It was while we were revisiting the impact the REACH program was having on the teachers and the children that we became aware that a spiral process was taking place that resembled the hermeneutic circle described by Gallagher (1992). As we became

impacted and changed, we found our teaching changed as well. This changed the way our students began to view learning. The dynamics of the classroom changed as the curriculum and learning cycle was less certain, dependent on the previous event. Casandra became excited, not only by the growth she felt her children were experiencing, but her own personal growth as well. Her class had become more child centered. The "cute" boards she had created in the past were replaced with student work. Knowledge was becoming something not only to be displayed on a bulletin board, but something that affected the student's lives. It was not only tacit knowledge being learned, but emancipatory (Kinchloe 1991).

> I used to have my year mapped out. Now I let the kids direct the curriculum more. I still have certain things I want to do or get in, and I definitely have skills I want to teach, but I try to take my cue form the kids on the best ways to implement the teaching of those skills. It seems like I learn something, implement it, evaluate, and learn something new to make my program even better. It's kind of like that circle you've talked about Cathy.

Here Casandra is referring to the hermeneutic circle described by Gadamer (in Gallagher 1992). Not only was she changing her teaching methods, she was given power by naming these changes. As Casandra saw herself growing and changing through conversation, she realized the importance of change, something she had not always found easy. "As teachers, I think it is always important to be growing and changing. Our population is constantly growing and changing and we must grow with it."

Change was now becoming something not to be dreaded, but a process, a way of being. Support from our group became important in this process of growth. California had given incentives to schools for class size reduction in the primary grades. The cash

incentives had several stipulations attached. One stipulation regulated the number of students per teacher ratio as 20:1, another stipulation was the ongoing training of the teachers involved in the 20:1 class size reduction. As the district implemented seminars to go along with the state regulations for 20:1 class size reduction, new techniques were presented to supplement the REACH program, as well as ideas revisited that were presented at the original REACH seminar. With the presentation of new methods, materials, schedules, and evaluation tools, it was easy for us to become overwhelmed. Casandra states the importance of a conversational group,

> A support group like we have as first grade teachers here at Gomez, has been helpful in being able to bounce ideas off each other. As we talk together, I am better able to remember ideas that were given at the REACH conference and Good First Teaching. I gain a lot of encouragement from our support group. When I need support on how to deal with certain kids and their needs, it is sure good to know I have a group of supportive teachers to go to.

Julianne replied, "I think it is beneficial for all of us to do this even if we didn't have a new program."

The community of conversation became a significant factor in teachers feeling comfortable in implementing programs in the classroom, working with difficult situations, and having a sense of community within the work place. Conversation not only revealed the obvious, but often caused us to look deeper, linger, and change not only ways of teaching, but ways of looking at children, curriculum, and the world around us. It was through reflection that took place during and after the conversations that change was able to take place. Gallagher (1992) calls this reflection on a given pre-understanding a hermeneutical reflection. It is a reflection on a given pre-understanding

that brings before one something that would otherwise happen "behind one's back." Only through hermeneutical reflection do we come to see what has been otherwise conditioned by prejudice. This is an important part of enabling one to move through the hermeneutic circle. Movement within the circle is dependent on conversation and reflection.

Reading became not only a subject to be taught, but also an avenue to emancipation. Casandra believes,

> Reading gives knowledge and gives empathy towards fellow men, knowledge and empathy frees us to be contributing members in society. Our kids will need to know how to read enable to vote, to read the newspaper, to express opinions through the written word (letters to editor, congressmen, etc.) As the kids read and analyze characters and their decisions, they are being given critical thinking skills.

Julianne agreed. She saw reading and writing expanding the whole person. "It is not something to be done just in the classroom. It goes beyond the classroom. You need it to function in life." These participants saw literacy as an emancipatory issue, a skill needed to vote, read newspapers, and to express opinions through writing, such as letters to the editor or to congressmen. It is through the play involved in "good work" that one becomes emancipated. Kinchloe (1991) believes that good work involves work variety, work mate cooperation, the individual contribution to social welfare, and "play." It is through the play involved that one can manifest the absolute freedom which is the very being of the person (Gallagher 1992).

Reading from a hermeneutic perspective can enable us to see the world through another's eyes. This new vision enables us to become better citizens with an enriched interest in others' worlds, not just our own world.

## Critical Hermeneutics and Testing

During our third interview, Casandra came eager to share two hermeneutical experiences she had with standardized testing. She could hardly wait to tell us about the audible silences she found in the first grade standardized test. Before she began, she shared what she viewed as one positive experience with the testing this year. Having a girl in her classroom confined to a wheelchair had made Casandra more sensitive to references made or omitted to these issues in the curriculum and within testing. Casandra shared the excitement of her class as they were taking a standardized test in which the children were to read the sentence concentrating on the last word. They were then to match the picture with the last word.

> The sentence was "It is hard for Ken to walk, he uses his wheelchair." When Martha saw this she smiled, there was something on the test she could relate to. The children became excited. Juan said, "Look, there's the thing like Martha's." (referring to the wheelchair). You know they could relate to it in their experience too because they have a friend that's handicapped.

That was the positive experience Casandra had to share. Although many of her students were second language children, they knew that this question related to their classmate. The test question had meaning to them. It was relevant, it related to their phenomenological world.

Unfortunately, the first grade teachers agreed with Casandra that the majority of the test held little relevance to the lives of the children. The testing situation itself was not a lived experience in their lives. The world of the child, the phenomenological world Bowers speaks of, was being ignored (Bowers 1987). It was necessary that we taught the children the language of the test, the idea of the test, and how to bubble in only one bubble staying in the lines. This form of testing was not a normal function in the classroom. It made a foreign way of assessment become the manner in which our children were to be assessed, labeled, and scored. Question after question seemed to have little or no meaning to the students' lives. Little Jung Yoon raised her hand and in a pleading voice asked her teacher to tell her what item was pictured on the page. "Mrs. Littletone, could you please tell me what they're making here, we don't make this at my home. I don't know what these are called." This little girl wanted to identify with the muffins on the page, but they were not a part of her world. Question #18, "They are making some _____," held no meaning for Korean born Jung Yoon. It did not test if she could read the word muffin, as was the intent of the question, it instead tested if she knew what a muffin was. Pictures were culturally biased, outdated, or not within a first graders bank of knowledge. It was discouraging to a first grader who wanted to do well, but whose culture did not incorporate these American symbols as a way of life. This seemed to be the way the conversation led. The language and the test did not match. In one of the questions to test the long /a/ sound, a student blurted out, "Oh, that's the long a sound," but could not recognize a picture that matched the sound. The "play" had gone

out of school for this period of time. Play, as Gallagher (1992) uses the term, involves a transcendence that allows one to feel a head taller than himself. Neither these children nor the teachers felt tall during the test taking experience. If it was difficult only for the students, we may have been a little more understanding of the test; however, there were many questions the teachers had difficulty understanding. What was the purpose of the test?

Audible silences were evident in the test. If you were not middle class western culture, you were going to have difficulty showing your capabilities on this test. Gore, a small dark haired Armenian boy, wanted desperately for his teacher to tell him what "drag" meant in the sentence, "They will drag the blanket." Like the other children, he wanted to succeed, do well on the test, but drag was not in his Armenian vocabulary and had not yet entered into his English vocabulary.

Not only was the test unnatural for the students, the testing situation was an unnatural setting as well. These children were used to interactive learning, natural settings, and meaningful interaction. School was fun, a place to "play." A test in which they bubbled in meaningless questions for an hour block of time held little meaning for them. It was not relational to the children's experience. The testing situation took the play out of school (Gallagher 1992). The children did not lose themselves in the experience as one does in play, they instead were lost in the testing experience. If the children did come out of the experience changed, transformed as Gallagher described in the play situation, it was not a positive situation.

Not only did the group feel the questions were irrelevant, there was also a hermeneutical issue involved. Even among the participants in the discussion, it was not always clear as to which answer was to be the correct response. The children were to look at pictures and tell what was happening. It was only through discussion that even the teacher participants could figure out the "correct" answer. The questions left room for interpretation, yet the answers given showed only one to be correct. Casandra stated emphatically, "I think it's very much a test biased for kids who are from upper middle class homes." The other teachers felt the same way. Bower's (1987) audible silences were screaming to this group of teachers. If our children were going to do well on the test, we felt it would be necessary to "teach to the test," the vocabulary, the pictures, and the meaning. The children would have to learn the language of the upper middle class. We were not willing to sacrifice meaningful teaching for superficial teaching to increase test scores.

I recall walking into the teachers' lunchroom feeling frustrated that I had not taught to the test and wondering if had I given my children a disadvantage. I can still envision Anne's face as she said, "I'm just not going to worry about it, that test is not appropriate for our children."

There seemed to be an audible silence communicated throughout the test in the form of what cultural experiences these children should have to be considered educated. They should know what a muffin is, a pitcher full of lemonade, and how to take a standardized test. The teachers heard it clearly. Casandra felt the test announced, "This is what is

important. This is what you should know," when in fact few items on the test were important in this test setting.

At first, the test seemed like something we had to do, a requirement. It had been mandated by our district to see if the 20:1 ratio was making a difference in the classroom. But was it necessary? Did we have to give this test? Julianne talked about a neighboring school district that was going to test all first graders with standardized testing materials. The teachers of that district put up such a fuss that the district backed down and did not make them test the first graders. They said it was the best thing they had ever done.

That comment struck me. By pulling together, the teachers were empowered. Knowing I had also talked of empowerment in previous conversations, Casandra said, "So Cathy, should we get empowered"? Casandra was suggesting action involving the district office. Being new teachers to the district, Julianne and I thought we should wait until we were put on permanent status. Casandra's brain, however, continued to churn.

The conversation turned back to testing. Somehow this conversation could not get past the testing and the negative influences it had on our students, as well as on the teachers. In the discussion, Casandra spoke of her husband's school district and the standardized test they had adopted. Anger started to well up in Casandra's voice as she recalled viewing the test in our own district office and voting for a different test herself.

> It is sad to me that teachers went over there (to the district office), voted overwhelming for a different test. The curriculum council overrode that choice because they thought that the other districts surrounding us had adopted the IOWA Basic Skills test, so we should have the same one to coordinate with them. To me it's like is it better to be coordinated with the Union High School District or to have a test that's relevant to the kid's experience?

Julianne voiced the need for more local school and teacher input into the testing material being given our students. "Why can't the first grade teachers get together and make up our own test that is relevant to the first graders here in our diverse community, a test that is relevant to the way we teach." Here, Shor (1992) believes that critical hermeneutical teacher research and conversations can play a vital and enhancing role in directing curriculum creation. This would be true of testing as well.

The session was about to end. We had talked about the purpose of testing, reading, and how we could coordinate the teaching and testing to make them similar to real life situations. Realizing that talk is cheap, and we had indeed talked about empowering our students, I threw out two questions that were on my mind. "How can we change the testing to make it more functional" and "If we don't like what is happening with the testing, do we just accept it or do we become change agents"? It is not only in the reflection that critical change takes place, but in the reflection that brings about action. What kind of action was going to take place?

As we were leaving, Casandra began thinking out loud. Her wheels had continued to turn. "Do we want to wait or do we want to give our input now? Who is the right person to talk to about testing in our district"? Little did she know that she would be the person with an opportunity to voice our concerns. She was about to use the knowledge for social action (Kincheloe 1991).

## Final Interviews

The year was drawing to a close. We had scheduled our final interview for the last week of school. Before that interview could take place, an excited Casandra came to me with news that could not wait. "Where is your tape recorder? I have to tell you what happened in our diversity council meeting." I did not have the tape recorder in my pocket and we both had children entering our classrooms, but we agreed to meet in my classroom after school.

### An Empowered Teacher

I was as anxious to hear what she had to say as she was to share it with me. We sat down around the tape recorder and Casandra began.

> Cathy, I'm a little bit shy and also I don't like to be a complainer. I want to be a team player, but after talking to all of you guys, I really felt empowered to go to the diversity committee meeting and to share with Dr. Joe Bixby, the Associate Superintendent, some of the concerns we had.

She went on to comment on the emotion she felt by being empowered through dialogue with her peers.

> Being in a group with you guys, with other professionals, and seeing what your children's reactions were to the test, validated my experience. It made me feel empowered to talk about our evaluation tools and the injustices.

Casandra felt the practices taking place within the classroom and the testing situations were not just. Through conversation and her own trip through the hermeneutical circle, she was empowered to tie practice with justice (Gallagher 1992).

> I sat down with Dr. Bixby and I first mentioned my concern about how we share with these second language children all year long how valuable they are, that their experiences are important, and that they have knowledge that is important to share with others in the classroom. After I tell them this all year long, I turn around and evaluate them not on what they've learned or on their experience, but on our experience, on our upper middle class white framework. I feel like it is really sad.

She was referring to what Drake and Ryan (1994) acknowledge as knowledge that represents the interests of those who pass on the knowledge. Whose knowledge was being passed on to these students?

She went on to point out parts of the test that concerned her.

> I showed him points of the test where my good readers, my kids who've come a long way this year, could not score correctly simply because the pictures on the test were things that have to do with a kitchen home life that was not relevant to my children.

She was trying to make him aware that the test was discarding the phenomenological world of these children, which Bowers (1987) believes is essential to making education meaningful to the child. Her conversation continued. She drew upon the power she had gained through being given the language to name what is (Gallagher 1992).

> He listened attentively and wrote down my concerns. I was feeling empowered. It was really interesting because here I am learning the word "audible silences" from you, I didn't even know the word before and yet being able to name the injustices on the test gave me strength, power. It was funny because as I was talking to him I realized that I couldn't even explain it to him without using that word. I said, "You know, like an audible silence." He looked at me like I don't know. I'm no big person when it comes to being able to explain the term so I did my best. I shared with him that I felt that an audible silence was like here we are talking about our world and their world is silent.

Not only did Casandra have power to name what is, but the power of language caused Dr. Bixby to hear what she had to say. With this power, she went on to conclude their conversation.

> We are not giving a voice to what their experience is on the test. He must have been impressed. He wrote the word down along with my hasty definition. I also shared with him the positive about my little girl in the wheelchair and how her voice was there because there was a question on the test about wheelchairs. Obviously, we can't have tests for each little subgroup in our classroom, but how it's important to be sensitive and to try to make the test revolve around words we have in common in a classroom.

Casandra had become empowered, not only in her classroom, but in her world. It was through being given the power to name what is, and a support group to affirm her, that she was able to voice her concerns.

Casandra went on to share how she had felt empowered because she had the vocabulary to express herself in an educated way. She felt she was listened to because she had more of an educated voice with experiences to back what she was saying. This is what Shor (1992) refers to as empowerment, where two cultures come together to create an empowering zero paradigm. In this paradigm, the "less than zero" habits and values of students and teachers that interfere with critical learning combine with the "more than zero" thoughts and actions that support empowerment to create a critical paradigm supporting transformational learning.

A democratic dialogue was now able to take place. She felt he did respond to two important points. Number one, he informed her that the test was nationally normed and some of the questions were geared so that maybe the person in Illinois will get the right answer and the person in California will not, vice versa. Another thing he said was that 50% is grade level norm for children.

As Casandra shared this information not only with me, but with the other first grade teachers, there were mixed feelings. Who wants to take a test where they are only expected to get 50% correct? What does it do to a child's self esteem? What do parents think when their children score 50%? There's a certain amount of self-esteem, even for the parents. One step had been made, but many more still needed to be taken. Given the power to question given assumptions had made this group of teachers still uncertain with the testing procedure.

There are children in our classrooms from India who must pass proficiencies to go on to the next grade. These parents believe their child has failed the test. If we are to empower immigrants and their children in our society, it will not be through standardized tests that make them feel poorly about themselves.

## Final Group Reflections

The last interview actually took place in June 1997, the last week of school. Although everyone was anxious for summer vacation, they agreed to meet together as an entire first grade group one last time. This was to be the last time we would all be together as a group of first grade teachers. Anne was moving to second grade the following year. We would miss her as a part of our immediate team, but would be glad she would still be around.

As we gathered around the table this last time and pressed the tape recorder, an interviewer's worst nightmare occurred, the tape recorder would not work. We were not going to be able to tape this last session as planned. Being a teacher used to making the

best of every situation, I pulled out my pencil and paper and hurriedly jotted down as much as I could.

Sara, who was rather quiet and tended to work alone much of the time, stated that it was important to have each other, but "We must look at what our individual children need." Each teacher seemed to echo this sentiment. A shift in emphasis this year had been away from a set curriculum to one generated by listening to the children and what they needed, wanted, and were interested in learning. For Anne and Casandra this meant some of their thematic units were not unpacked. Anne stated, " It is not letting the curriculum stand in the way. I used thematic units as a vehicle to help the children learn what they needed and wanted to know." Thematic units were used as one of many tools to create a positive learning environment.

Julianne found that weather was not something her children would usually write about in their daily journal, however, when she began writing about it during her morning message time, they became excited and the children's journals were filled with exciting stories centered around the weather. Anne, as did the rest of the first grade teachers, gave her class the freedom to write about whatever they wanted to in their daily journals. She reflects on this as she stated, "I always remind them that they should write about what is important to them, however, they always seem to write about whatever I have written about in the morning message." Her influence as a teacher was evident in their writings. Although Anne's students often wrote about her topic, she encouraged them to look

deeper into their own phenomenological world for their writing resources as Bowers (1987) suggests.

Another aspect of change for Anne was found in her spelling program. After ten years of grading spelling on weekly formal tests, she dropped the formal testing and began concentrating on words found in their daily writing. She would use the words the children were misspelling in their daily writing during her morning message activities. The incorporation of spelling instruction into daily routines, like morning message and journal writings, paid off for Anne. She was amazed to find that the children's writing had more correct spelling now than in the past when she had done formal spelling list instruction.

Casandra felt this was a year of growth for her as a person and as a teacher. She often joked with me that she had entered "Cathy Thornton's school of thinking." As we talked often throughout the year, I felt like she must have been hidden away in my bag attending classes with me at San Jose State. She quickly picked up on terms and language I seemed to struggle with throughout my graduate study.

This had been a year of change and growth; a year filled with new ideas and dreams. Questions had arisen, some answered, some unanswered. It was a beginning. Some of us had made our way around the hermeneutical circle several times, others were still caught somewhere in the middle. Only each participant knows where they truly are in the process.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# INSIGHTS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Entering into the research experience brought forth excitement, fear, and anxiety. Being involved in critical qualitative research put me in a state of flux. I was never quite sure where the next interview would go. I felt it was important not only to go into each interview with my agenda or questions, but also to let the participants' voice their feelings, insights, and input even if it meant we strayed from, or put aside, my original agenda. Reflection shows this to be valuable research. Rather than just writing about what scholars have said interviewing teachers for their beliefs and understandings and reporting on them in this thesis, qualitative research allowed the participants to truly participate in how the paper would evolve, the direction it would take, and the final results.

## Insights Gained From the Research Experience

The research brought forth six requisites for meaningful change in school practices to take place. These center on the need for:

1. access to a community of support in the school setting,
2. involvement in teacher/participator critical research,
3. commitment to engagement in real conversation,
4. openness to change,

5. awareness of whose knowledge is being portrayed in classrooms, and
6. willingness to "play."

### Access to a Community of Support in the School Setting

The support gained from meeting as a group of first grade teachers strengthened each participants capability to implement the REACH program. This was clearly vocalized throughout the interviews. Strength was gained through meeting together on a regular basis and commitment to setting aside a block of time on a periodic basis to meet and discuss curriculum, students, needs, and important issues affecting the classroom. New teachers are often hired, assigned to a classroom, and sent out to conquer the world without systematic support from their peers built into the process. Teachers are given little time to collaborate within the contract time.

Administrators, mindful of quality rather than quantity, need to allocate more time for collaboration among teachers. This needs to take place not only within grade levels at the school site, but also among inter-grade levels at the school site and within the district. Such a commitment could provide a unity of purpose that would encourage success and collaboration among all teachers rather than competition.

### Involvement in Teacher/Participator Critical Research

The research was set at Gomez Elementary School, a familiar setting for me, the researcher. When my children attended Gomez, I had been on the School Site Council. Later, I substituted at the school. Now, I am teaching at the school. Being a participant in this research enabled me to gain the confidence of the other participants in the research

project, the first grade teachers at Gomez. The peer connection with the researcher allowed participants to be themselves in the interviews and truly lose themselves in the process rather than act as casual participants. The project also proved valuable to the participants. They participated not only because I had approached them to be a part of my research project, but also because they truly wanted to dialogue, learn, and grow from the process.

The process of teacher as researcher brings the value of research to the school site. I recently pulled a file from my file cabinet that was only a few years old. It was from an inservice day attended where an "outsider" came in and talked to the staff about our school's mission statement. The speaker came and went. He had no vested interest in whether the mission was accomplished. When teachers are the researchers, they vest themselves in the process. I not only interviewed these first grade teachers to complete my project, I truly cared about their classrooms, work, and school, as well as their personal growth as colleagues. Research has more value when it is done with, rather than to, someone.

### Commitment to Engagement in Real Conversation

The school offered the original REACH training, and the district offered training to support class size reduction in the first grade. All of this training would have been futile without time to plan and prepare, time to observe other successful teachers in action, and scheduled time to dialogue with, and across, grade levels. Trends in reading instruction propose something new every few years to "cure the ills of our illiterate children." Yet

another program will fail if there is not consistent, ongoing support and dialogue. I would suggest that not only grade level teachers, but inter-grade level teachers, join in the dialogue. Through such dialogue, we could come to know one another as professional colleagues and learn about the other classrooms, thereby gaining insights into how to improve our own teaching.

This change from traditional teaching to an integrated approach caused us to view ourselves and our practice in a transformative manner. Kincheloe (1991) claims that as teachers "deconstruct the taken-for-granted practices, beliefs and assumptions of teaching...teachers [may] break through the fog of expert knowledge that has often served to stifle progressive change in the schools" (220). The implementation of a new approach to reading created an opportunity for all of us at Gomez to examine our unquestioned assumptions and ideas.

Conversation was an essential and central part of the research process. Through qualitative research, questions were planned and asked, but the participants were the true guides of the discussions and research. The conversation became more genuine as the participants felt comfortable to share what was important to them rather than what was important to the researcher. Through conversation, transformation occurred. Casandra might not have found the words to express herself in an empowering way had we not held many formal and informal conversations about our classrooms, curriculum, and administrative procedures. Through conversation strength was gained to move from "normal" practices to approaches that seemed real, valuable, and important.

Conversation not only leads to new ideas, but allows for accountability. When I knew I would be meeting with the other teachers to discuss what I was doing in my classroom, I wanted to make sure that I was doing my best, that I had something exciting to share. It was through conversations, held during the interview process, that transformation took place and teachers felt empowered. In Kathleen's case, she was given the confidence to approach a district level administrator regarding change.

**Openness to Change**

Throughout the interviews we talked about change. Talking about change comes rather easy while actually taking the steps towards change can be daunting. Throughout the year, we were not only open to change, but welcomed the change. We believed this change would enable us to better prepare our students for the future. In an effort to be the best teacher possible, two veteran teachers were willing to reevaluate past curriculum practices and make changes to improve. Through ongoing conversation, they were able to get outside of their own thinking and move through the hermeneutical circle toward new understandings.

If change is going to take place in the schools today, it will not come through administrative mandate. It will come through teachers who are willing to change themselves. Teachers must be willing to enter the hermeneutic circle, willing to reevaluate their thinking on an ongoing basis. This does not mean change just for the sake of change. Genuine change, built upon reflection on one's practice, will provide for long-term reform in education.

## Awareness of Whose Knowledge is Being Portrayed in the Classrooms

As the year progressed, we became aware that the knowledge being shared with our students in textbooks was not neutral. Through printed and spoken word, and absences due to audible silences, many messages were being conveyed to students in subtle ways. Teachers need to be taught critical methods to deobjectify knowledge for their students. Unfortunately, many teachers are not aware that they teach as "factual" knowledge that which is not factual. As teachers become aware of the "audible silences" in the curriculum, they will not only have the possibility of becoming critical teachers, but students will be empowered to become critical thinkers as well. Teachers, unaware that they are guilty of passing on subjective information as the truth, serve to disempower themselves and their students. Only when teachers become aware that the information in their manuals, the media, and the text, is not biased, will they be able to help their students become critical thinkers.

## Willingness to "Play"

The "play" described by Gallagher (1992) became a part of the process. It was through this playful type of experience that change truly took place. Julianne, Casandra, and I grew closer through the dialogue and began planning together. Julianne and I began planning weekly lessons together. Casandra followed her own plans, but we often shared ideas and incorporated these, along with her materials and insights, into weekly planning. Anne and Sara totally followed their own plans. The time spent in dialogue and

interaction during the interviews, however, helped us to gain a sense of unity that may have otherwise been lost.

Casandra and I entered into a "play" experience and came to realize that transformation was taking place. The research became not only a project to be completed, but a playful experience in which we entered a constant state of reconstruction. This promoted our learning about ourselves, both in the classroom and in our personal lives. Once teachers understand that play holds great power for transformation, they will be able to build a playful meaningful curriculum for their students.

## Conclusions

This research explored the transformation of teachers as they involved themselves in the process of change through critical conversation. The study did not deal with the impact the research process, or the conversation, had on the school. Although the study did not address this issue, it would be worthy of further examination as evidence of change continues to take place not only within the research group, but the entire staff of Gomez Elementary School.

Time is a necessary factor for change to occur. Although time is a priceless commodity in our fast paced world today, it is imperative that time be taken and given for the following recommendations to take place:

1. Time needs to be provided by the school districts and school sites for critical dialogue among teachers.

2. Teacher preparation and inservice needs to include training that will enable teachers to recognize the audible silences found in the curriculum.

3. Whereas most teachers work in singular isolation within the classroom, consideration should be given to the creation of contexts that promote conversation.

4. Teachers need to be made aware that knowledge is not neutral. Education needs to take place giving teachers understandings that will help promote the different forms of knowledge.

5. Schools need to find ways to promote "good work" and "play" as described by Kinchloe (1991).

Effort, on the part of school administration, both at a district level and at the local school sites, is needed to encourage teachers to engage in meaningful critical conversation. It is through critical conversation that the players in the education game will enter the hermeneutical circle enabling them to come out changed, eager and ready to re-enter and repeat the process. Our schools, children, teachers, administrators and society will benefit from the process.

# EPILOGUE

My journey through graduate school led me to new thought patterns and actions, both personally and professionally. I have always tended to take the path of least resistance, make peace, and keep peace. I did not tend to question present authority, literature, historical facts, news educational "specialist" or any authoritarian figure.

Becoming a critical hermeneutical learner caused me to question the authenticity of "facts" presented by the media, printed text, "experts" and authorities. I have realized that information is biased and reflects the personality and beliefs of the author. Not only do I question, but I now teach my first graders to question me, books, videos and information presented to them. Who is presenting the material? Why are they presenting it? Are their audible silences?

Examining and re-examining beliefs and values is an ongoing process. It is not always a comfortable process. Entering the hermeneutic circle is a journey that is both exciting and painful for a person who has taken the path of least resistance with others. Not only is the process sometimes difficult, but a choice must be made at the end as to whether I will hold on to my current beliefs or go on evaluating and re-evaluating. Not only have I had to truly seek out what I believe and why I believe, but what am I going to do with my beliefs.

On this journey, I have had to use the medium of conversation. It is only through verbalizing my beliefs that I have been able to move on to action. Conversation with those around me has held me accountable to move on to action, not just talk. This is true

in my personal and professional life. I have found it very important to surround myself with people who are willing to enter into a critical hermeneutical dialogue.

My official master's work has ended, but the journey is ongoing. It has not ended, and cannot end as long as I want to grow as a professional and as an individual. I imagine I will continue on my path of the hermeneutical circle as I continue to grow.

## SELECTED READINGS

Adams, M. J. 1990. Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print. Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press.

Blackie, John. 1968. "How Children Learn." NEA Journal 47: 40-42.

Bond, Guy L., and Robert Dykstra. 1967. "The cooperative research program in first grade reading instruction." Reading Research Quarterly 2. (Summer): 1-142.

Bowers, Chet A. 1987. The promise of theory: Education and the politics of cultural change. New York: Teacher's College Press.

Breen, M., and C. Candlin. 1979. "Essentials of a communicative curriculum applied linguistics." Applied Linguistics. 1(2): 90-112.

Chomsky, N. 1975. Reflections on language. New York: Pantheon.

Cunningham, Patricia M. and Richard L. Allington. 1994. Classrooms that work: They can all read & write. New York: Harper Collins College Publishers.

Doll, W. Jr. 1993. A post-modern perspective on curriculum. New York: Teacher's College Press.

Drake, Susan M. and James Ryan. 1994. "Narrative and knowing: Inclusive pedagogy in contemporary times." Curriculum and Teaching. 9(1): 45-56.

Friere, Paulo. 1970. Pedagogy of the oppressed. New York: Seabury.

Gallagher, Shaun. 1992. Hermeneutics and education. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Garcia, Eugene. 1994. Understanding and meeting the challenge of student culture diversity. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Glesne, C., and Peskin, A. 1992. Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction. White Plains, NY: Longman.

Habermas, Jurgen. 1971. Knowledge and the human interests. Translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro. Boston: Beacon Press.

Hall, D., C. Prevatte and P. Cunningham. 1994. "Eliminating ability grouping and failure in the primary grades." In R.L. Allington and S.A. Walmsley (Eds.) No quick fix: rethinking literacy programs in America's elementary schools. New York: Teacher's College Press.

Halliday, M.A.K. 1979. Towards a sociological semantics in the communicative approach to language teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hargreaves, Andy. 1994. Changing teachers, changing time: Teachers work and culture in the postmodern age. New York: Teachers College Press.

Hopkins, David. 1994. A teacher's guide to classroom research. Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Husserl, Edmund. 1973. Experience and judgment: Investigations in a genealogy of logic. Translated by James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Hymes, D. 1970. "On communicative competence." In J. Gumperz, and D. Hymes, Eds. Directions in Sociolinguistics. pp. 35-71. New York: Holt, Reinhart & Winston.

Jalongo, Mary Renck, Joan P. Isenberg and Gloria Gerbracht. 1995. Teachers' stories: From personal narrative to professional insight. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Kieffer, C. 1981. Doing 'dialogic retrospection': Approaching empowerment through participatory research. Edinburgh, Scotland: presented at Interantional Meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology, University of Edinburgh.

Kinchloe, Joe L. 1991. Teachers as researchers: Qualitative inquiry as a path to empowerment. Philadelphia: The Falmer Press.

Moll, Luis C. 1990. Vygotsky and education: Instructional implications and applications of sociohistorical psychology. New York: Cambridge University Press.

National Society for the Study of Education. The twenty-fourth yearbook of the national society for the study of education. 1925. Part 1. Bloomington, IL: Public School Publishing Co.

Oliver, Donald. 1990. "Grounded knowing: a postmodern perspective on teaching and learning." Educational Leadership 48 (September): 64-69.

Robinson, H. Alan. 1977. Reading and writing instruction in the United States: Historical trends. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills.

Rogers, Dwight L., George W. Noblit & Phyllis Ferrell. 1990. "Action research as an agent for developing teachers' communicative competence." Theory into practice. XXIX: 3 (Summer): 179-184.

Salz, Arthur. 1992. "Brother, can you paradigm? Quantum mechanics and the first grade reading test." Theory into practice. XXXI: 2 (Spring): 107-115.

Satre, Jean Paul. 1956. Being and nothingness: An essay on phenomenological ontology. Translated by H. E. Barnes. New York: Philosophical Library.

Schliemacher, Friedrich. 1977. Hermeneutics: The handwritten manuscripts. Translated by J. Duke and J. Forstman. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 96.

Seidman, I.E. 1991. Interviewing as qualitative research. New York: Teachers College Press.

Shor, Ira. 1992. Empowering education: critical teaching for social change. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

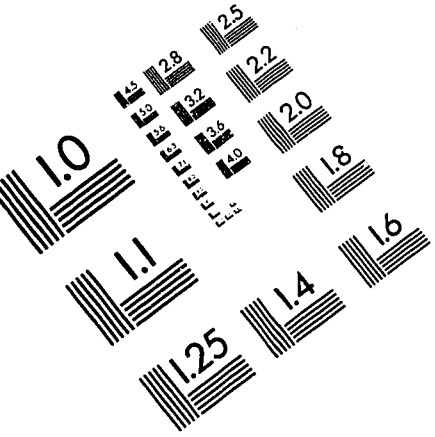
Smith, Frank. 1975. Comprehension and learning: a Conceptual framework for teachers. New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston.

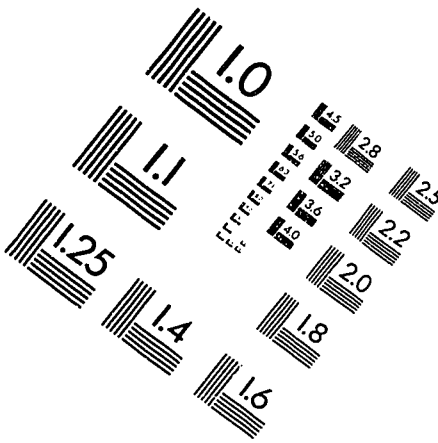
Smith, Nila Banton. 1965. American reading instruction. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

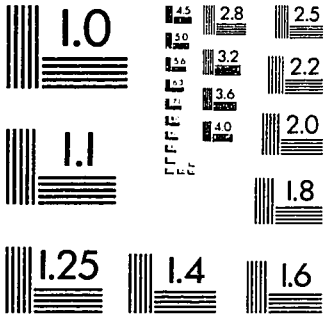
Van Manen, M. 1990. Researching lived experience. London, Ontario, Canada: The University of Western Ontairo

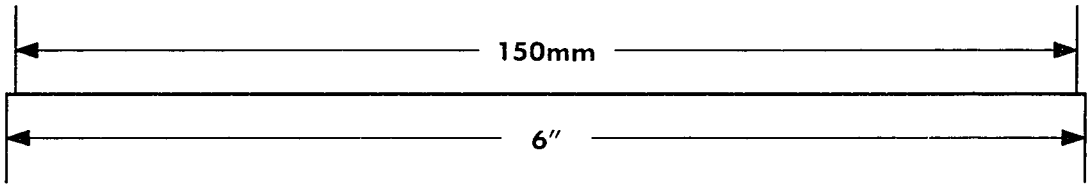
Vygotsky, L. 1978. Mind in society. Cambridge: Harvard University.

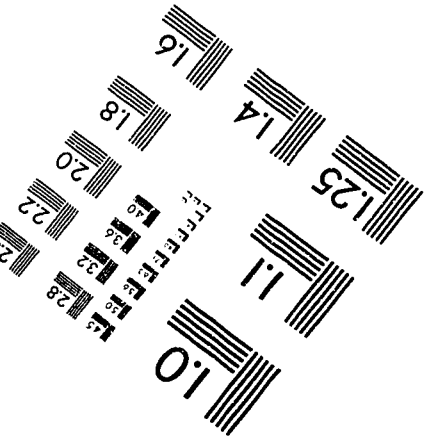
# IMAGE EVALUATION
# TEST TARGET (QA-3)




APPLIED IMAGE, Inc
1653 East Main Street
Rochester, NY 14609 USA
Phone: 716/482-0300
Fax: 716/288-5989

© 1993, Applied Image, Inc., All Rights Reserved